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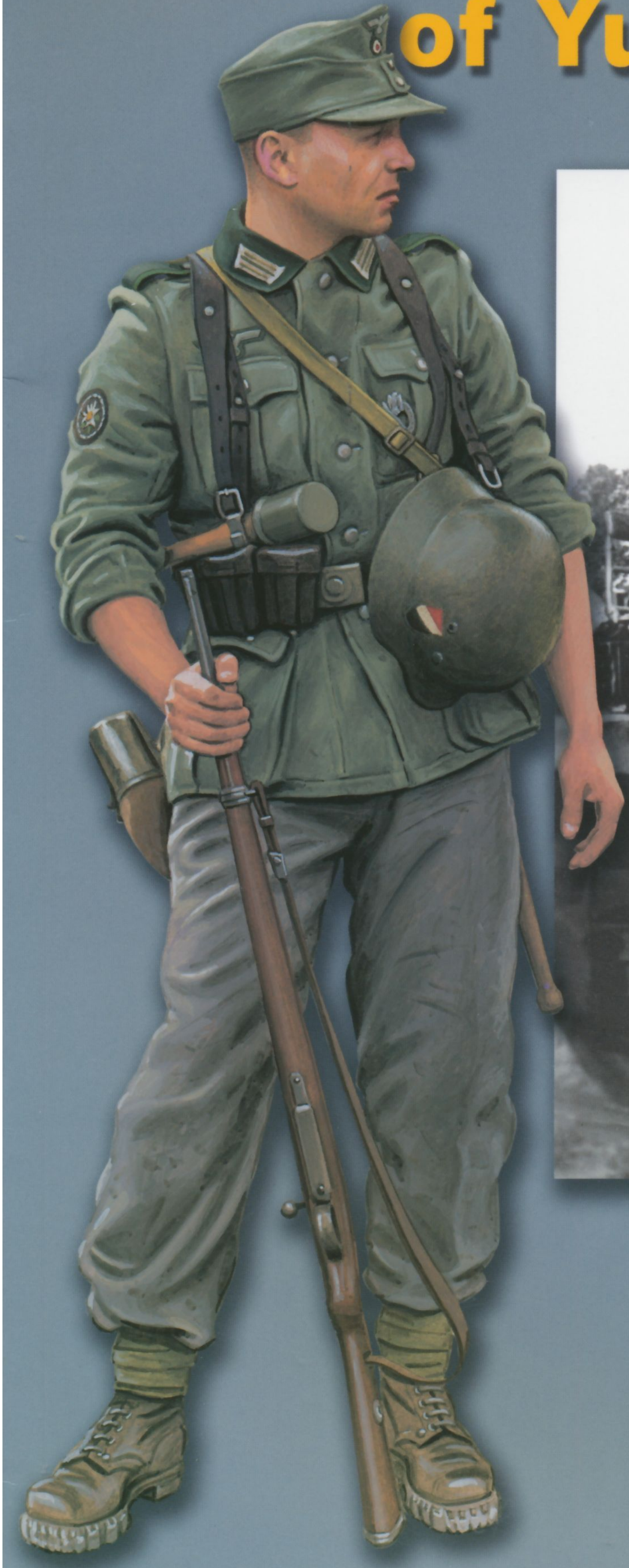
The German Invasion of Yugoslavia 1941

Gordon Rottman & Dmitriy Zgonnik



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Introduction

Before discussing Operation 25, the April 1941 Axis invasion of Yugoslavia—the "April War"—we must first briefly examine the geography of the Balkans. The Balkans—southeast Europe—the Balkans Peninsula named after the Balkan Mountains running through central Bulgaria, encompass Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Albania, and the small piece of European Turkey with Istanbul. Yugoslavia with almost 99,000 square miles (158,944km^2) was the largest of the countries with Romania the second largest followed by Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania. In 1941 Yugoslavia was surrounded by enemies. The rugged length of its west coast faced the Adriatic Sea controlled by the Italian Navy. A small stretch of Yugoslavia's northwest corner bordered Italy's Trieste region. Its northern border was faced by Germany (previously Austria) and further east, the German's ally, Hungary. On its eastern border was Romania and to that country's south was Bulgaria, both which had sided with Germany. The southern border faced Greece and thrusting into Yugoslavia's southeast corner on the Adriatic was Italian-controlled Albania.

These states held longstanding disputes among themselves. It was a region writhing in turmoil and had contributed to the start of World War I. Most of Yugoslavia's neighbors were enemies. Germany and Italy of course, but Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria had all joined the Tripartite Pact. Italy had invaded Albania two years earlier and in October 1940 launched a poorly planned invasion into neighboring Greece, after informing Germany only the day before. Albania was the first European country to be invaded by Axis forces. The Greeks thoroughly beat the Italians driving them back into Albania with a high degree of humiliation. Hitler had to salvage the situation to reestablish the Axis image, but there was another equally important reason to seize Greece. A Greece containing British bomber bases was a serious threat to Romanian oilfields, Germany's only source of oil.

Yugoslavia possessed much varied terrain. In the north were the fertile plains of the Darva River basin. The limestone Dinaric Alps parallel the Adriatic coast and stretch inland merging into the eastern Balkans and southeastern Rhodope Mountains. The numerous small rivers and streams mostly flowed to the north into the Darva basin or southwest toward the coast. In the south the rivers flowed north or northeast toward the Danube or south through Greece to the Aegean Sea. There were few large cities. The capital, Belgrade, was in the northeast only 50 miles (75km) from the Bulgarian border. Zagreb was in the northwest, Sarajevo in the center, and Skopje in the southeast. The weather in early April alternated between rainy days and partly cloudy to clear skies. The high temperature was around 60° F (15° C) with a low of 40° F (4° C). Actually, daily temperatures could vary slightly higher or lower than these temperatures.

Prelude to the Invasion

Besides the Italians occupying Albania and of course newly acquired German-Austria on the north border of Yugoslavia, the first Axis troops to move into the region in October 1940 were German, ostensibly as advisors to reorganize the Bulgarian Army. Even with the Italians suffering major defeats in Greece in November (they would not be entirely cleared from the country until January) the Germans continued to manipulate and pressure countries in the region and adjacent to it to join the Axis. In early December the outline plan for an attack on the Soviet Union was presented to Hitler. At the same time he ordered the planning for the invasion of Greece. Yugoslavia, which was trying to avoid being forced into a German partnership, signed a treaty with German-allied Hungary. Directive 20 was issued by Hitler for Operation Marita, the invasion of Greece. In January 1941 Hitler told Mussolini, who rejected German assistance in Albania, which the Greeks had now entered, that German forces would attack into Greece from Bulgaria if Commonwealth forces arrived there. These had already been promised to Greece by the British. Bulgaria had already agreed to the transit of German forces across the country. Bulgaria would also become a launch site for the invasion of Greece and soon joined the Tripartite. In early March Hitler met with Yugoslavian representatives and he demanded they make a choice between joining with Germany or the British. Through mid-March fighting continued in Albania with the Greeks making further progress. Yugoslavia was given an ultimatum to decide if they were for or against Germany on 19 March. They had five days to decide. The Yugoslavian Prime and Foreign Ministers finally signed the Tripartite Pact in Vienna on 25 March. This resulted in protests in Belgrade and two days later an Air Force-led coup changed the government. On the same day Hitler ordered Directive 25 and the planning for the invasion of Yugoslavia. The next day the British informed the new government that there is little they could do. There are not enough troops available to defend both Greece and Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia made one last grasp at preventing a German invasion. On 5 April the Soviet-Yugoslav Non-Aggression Pact was signed, but it is too late. The combined forces of three countries were poised the strike. The invasion of Greece is to be launched at the same time from Bulgaria.

Invasion

In the early dawn hours of 6 April 1941 the assembled German units began to move and aircraft were launched. Italian Navy forces cruised along the Yugoslavian coast. The German 12.Armee (Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List) launched its attack from Bulgaria into extreme southeast Yugoslavia against light resistance. Air raids repeatedly struck Belgrade from Germany and Romania devastating the city as a means of revenge by Hitler for not joining the Axis. Over 17,000 dead lay in the blasted ruins. The 12.Armee forces, two corps, swung south for the Greek border and a third corps crosses directly into Greece from Bulgaria further to the east. They were faced by Greek, British, Australian, and New Zealand forces. The mission of 12.Armee was the invasion of Greece and other than passing through extreme southern Yugoslavia and maintaining supply lines from Bulgaria via Yugoslavia into Greece, these forces took no further part in the invasion. 2.Armee (Generaloberst Maximilian Reichsfreiherr von Weichs zu Glon), supported by Luftflotte 4 (Air Fleet) (Generaloberst Alexander Löhr) was responsible for the occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The full force of the Axis invasion is not launched until 8 April. Panzergruppe 1 (Generaloberst Paul Ludwig Ewald von Kleist), an army-size formation of three corps, thrust across the Bulgarian border and seized Nis in the evening after destroying the border defenders. Panzergruppe 1 would continue to strike northwestward toward Belgrade. The next day 2.Armee forces with two corps in Germany, one in Romania, and another in Hungary launched their attacks. XLI.Korps rolling out of Romania headed directly for Belgrade on two routes for a pincer movement. XXXXVI.Panzerkorps crossed the Hungarian border and seized Zagreb on the 10th, the day after crossing the border. That day Radio Zegreb proclaimed the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia allied to Germany, its new leader then in Rome. This corps eventually split to follow three routes all to converge on Sarajevo on the 16th. Elements would continue on to the coast to link-up with Italian forces converging from Albanian and Italy. Two more 2.Armee corps attacked out of Germany (Austria) toward Zagreb. Panzergruppe 1 elements were the first to reach Belgrade on the 12th, but only just ahead of German forces from the north and west. The Italian 2° Armata (General des. A. Vittorio Ambrosio) attacked cautiously out of Trieste with three corps. They first pushed east to link-up with German 2.Armee forces and then moved down the coast to Nis. Another Italian corps attacked out of Albania toward nearby Nis while the 9° and 11° Armata stayed in-place in southeast Albania holding Greek forces in check as 12.Armee ploughed into Greece. In the meantime the Hungarian 3rd Army (Lieutenant General Elemér Gorondy-Novak), mainly motivated by territorial gain, attacked southward toward Novi Sad on the 11th. The Hungarians sent in four "corps;" these being division sized formations with three brigades each. The Hungarians were slowed by civilian mobs and experienced little resistance from the Yugoslavian Army.

Yugoslavia formally capitulated on 17 April, 11 days after the invasion commenced. The country was soon divided up between Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Bulgaria for occupation. Germany occupied the largest piece of the cleaved up country, Serbia in the west, which included Belgrade.

Yugoslavia was basically dissolved by the Germans and various puppet states established. A vicious guerrilla war, the People's Liberation War, ensued with factions fighting each other as much as the occupiers.

German losses were extremely light for an operation of this scope. Only 151 killed, 392 wounded, and 14 missing. Italian and Hungarian losses were negligible. Yugoslavian military losses have never been fully determined, just a few thousand in all categories. Many thousands of civilians were killed and wounded though. Up to 345,000 Yugoslavian prisoners were taken by the Germans and 30,000 by the Italians. The many conscripted Croatian, Macedonians, and ethnic German and Hungarian prisoners were soon released. Many of these were recruited into various security forces.

Opposing Forces

Yugoslavian Forces

Facing the Axis onslaught was the Royal Yugoslavian Army comprised of many ethnic groups often unable to communicate effectively. Of the Army's 28 infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions, and 32 independent regiments, only 11 divisions were in their assigned defensive positions when the invasion was launched. Most of these divisions were at only 70 to 90 percent strength. Mobilization had started far too late and many of the 1,200,000 called up troops never made it to their units. The Army had only two battalions of mostly French World War I light tanks and the Air Force had fewer than 500 aircraft. The Army was comprised of three army groups. 1st Army Group with 4th and 6th Armies was in Croatia in the northern portion of the country. Manned mainly by Croatian troops, many deserted as they were pro-German. The 2nd Army Group with the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Armies was deployed along the Romanian border. The 3rd Army Group with the 3rd and 5th Armies defended the border with Albania.

German Forces

- 2.Armee
  - 2.Armee Reserve
    - 169.Infanterie-Division
    - 197.Infanterie-Division
  - LII.Armeekorps (en route)
    - 79.Infanterie-Division
    - 125.Infanterie-Division
  - XXXXIX.Gebirgskorps
    - 1.Gebirgs-Division
    - 53.z.b.V. Division
  - LI.Armeekorps
    - 101.Jäger-Division (minus elements)
    - 132.Infanterie-Division
    - 183.Infanterie-Division
  - XXXXVI.Armeekorps (motorisiert)*
    - 8.Panzer-Division
    - 14.Panzer-Division
    - 16.Infanterie-Division (motorisiert)
  - Panzergruppe 1
    - XI.Armeekorps
      - 60.Infanterie-Division (motorisiert)
      - 76.Infanterie-Division
      - 198.Infanterie-Division
    - XIV.Armeekorps
      - 4.Gebirgs-Division
      - 5.Panzer-Division
      - 11.Panzer-Division
      - 294.Infanterie-Division
    - XXXXI.Armeekorps (motorisiert)
      - SS-Division "Reich"
      - Infanterie-Regiment "Großdeutschland" (motorisiert)
      - Schützen-Regiment "Hermann Göring"

- 12.Armee (elements attacking Greece via Yugoslavia)
- XVIII.Gebirgskorps
  - 2.Panzer-Division
  - 5.Gebirgs-Division
  - 6.Gebirgs-Division
  - 72.Infanterie-Division
  - 125.Infanterie-Regiment (separate)
- XXXX.Armeekorps (motorisiert)
- 9.Panzer-Division
- 73.Infanterie-Division
- Liebstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" (motorisiert)

- OKH Reserves available to 2.Armee
- 4.Panzer-Division
- 12.Panzer-Division
- 19.Panzer-Division
- 100.Jäger-Division

Italian Forces

- Giulian Front (Northern Yugoslavia)
- 2nd Army
  - V Corps
    - 15th Infantry Division "Bergamo"
    - 57th Infantry Division "Lombardia"
    - Frontier Guard Division
  - VI Corps
    - 12th Infantry Division "Sassari"
    - 20th Infantry Division "Friuli"
    - 26th Infantry Division "Assieta"
  - XI Corps
    - 3rd Alpine Division "Ravenna"
    - 13th Infantry Division "Re"
    - 14th Infantry Division "Isonzo"
    - Frontier Guard Division
  - Auto-Transportable Corps
    - 9th Auto-Transportable Division "Pasubio"
    - 52nd Auto-Transportable Division "Torino"
    - 133rd Armored Division "Littorio"
  - Fast Mobile Corps
    - 1st Fast Mobile Division "Eugenio d'Savoia"
    - 2nd Fast Mobile Division "Emanuele F.T. d'Ferro"
    - 3rd Fast Mobile Division "principe A.D. d'Aosta"
- Upper Command Armed Forces Albania
  - XIV Corps
    - 38th (Mountain) Infantry Division "Puglie" (minus 72nd Infantry)
    - 4th Alpine Division "Cuneense"
  - XVII (Armored) Corps
    - 131st Armored Division "Centauro"
    - 32nd (Mountain) Infantry Division "Marche"
    - 72nd (Mountain) Infantry Regiment
    - Blackshirt Group "Diamanti"
    - Blackshirt Group "Skanderbeg"
  - Librazid Sector (remained in Albania)
    - 24th Infantry Division "Pinerolo"
    - 41st Infantry Division "Firenze"
    - 53rd (Mountain) Infantry Division "Arezzo"
    - Blackshirt Group "Biscaccianti"

Hungarian Forces

- 3rd Army
  - Mobile Corps
  - I Corps
  - IV Corps
  - V Corps
  - Army Reserves
    - 9th Infantry Brigade
    - 11th Infantry Brigade
    - River Brigade

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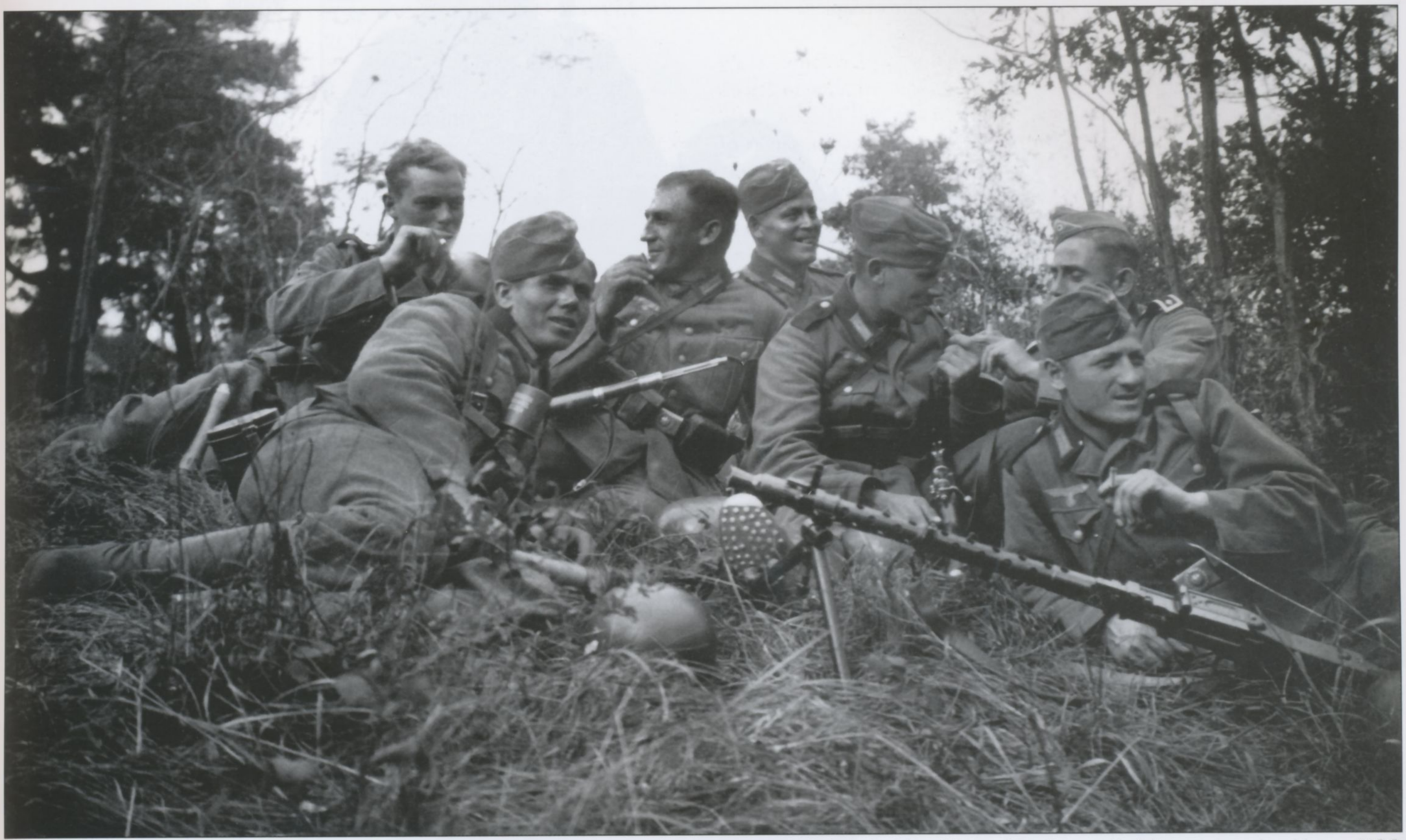
* Often misidentified as "XLVI.Panzerkorps." The Germans used "XXXVI" rather than the correct "XLVI" and it was not redesignated as a Panzerkorps until May 1941.

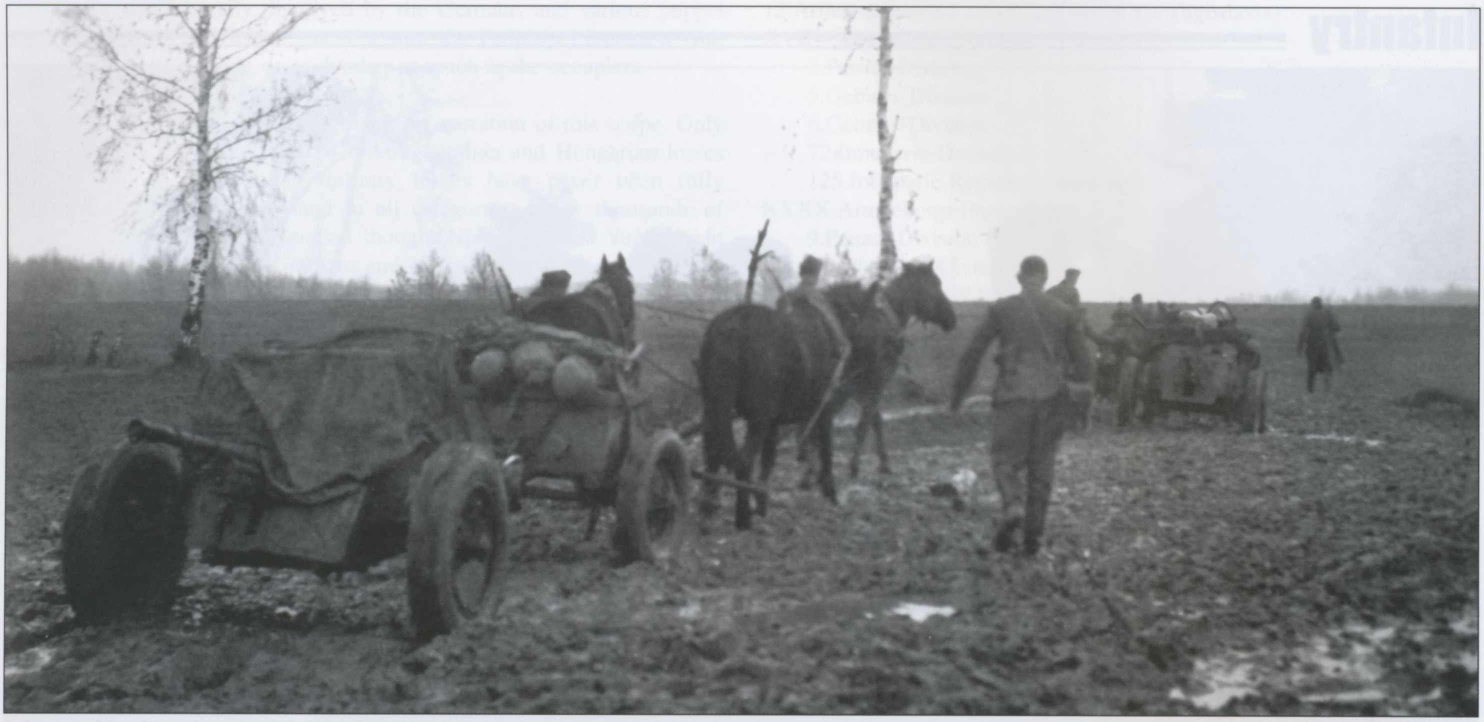


The Feldwebel, lighting the pipe of one of his soldiers, to the right may be these troops' platoon leader. More often than not platoons were lead by an NCO rather than a Leutnant. The 7.9mm MG34 light machine gun was the mainstay of the squad's firepower. Note the Stg24 stick hand grenade and the hobnail pattern of the marching boots including its steel toe cleat.

A Jägergruppe (light infantry squad) takes up position on a Yugoslavian ridge. They are rather close interval, 2 to 3 meters, much tighter than the usual 5 meters. While the position provides them with good fields of observation and fire, they can be dominated by an enemy on the higher ground before them and they are silhouetted on the barren crest.

Infantrymen pause on a mountain road to resupply before continuing the advance. In the background are Royal Yugoslavian Army prisoners.

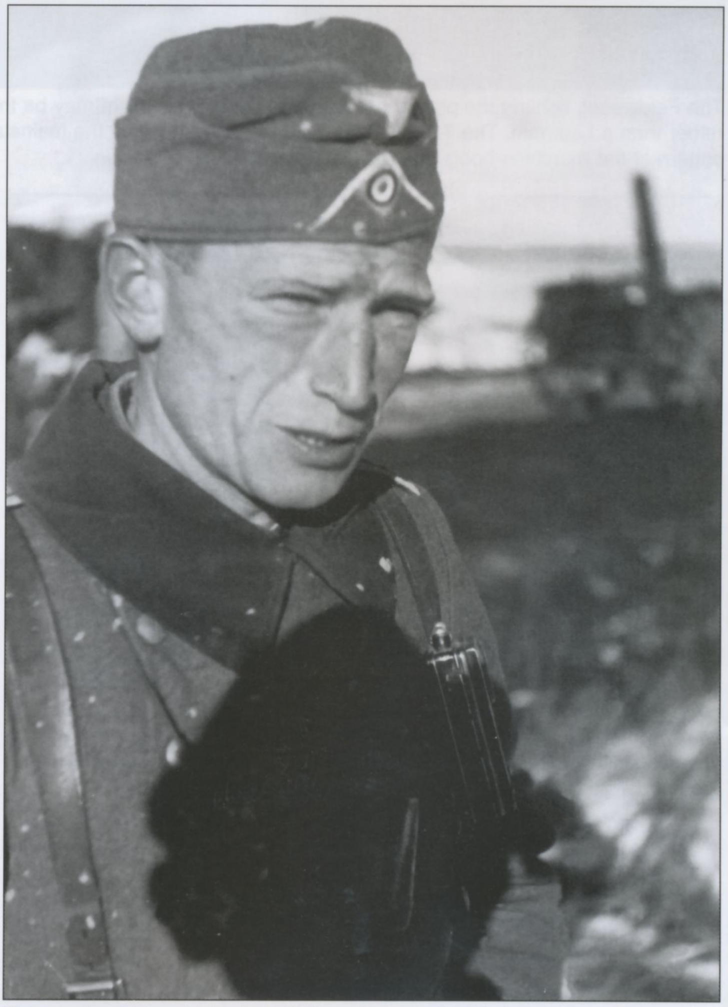
An infantry company leader (Kompanieführer) (center with hands clasped behind his back) briefs his NCOs wearing light field equipment. All have fresh Wehrmacht style haircuts, short on the sides and nape, and longish on top.



2.Armee drive from Austria. A 3.7cm Pak 35/36 antitank gun and its SdAh 32 ammunition limber (with fenders removed) are drawn by a team of horses with a third added because of the mud. Even in infantry regiments light trucks were normally provided to move antitank guns, but many recently raised infantry divisions and mountain divisions relied on horses. Motorized prime movers were preferred as it was necessary to rapidly relocate antitank guns from passion to position in order to survive and effective engage tanks. Note the crew's helmets slung on the limber.

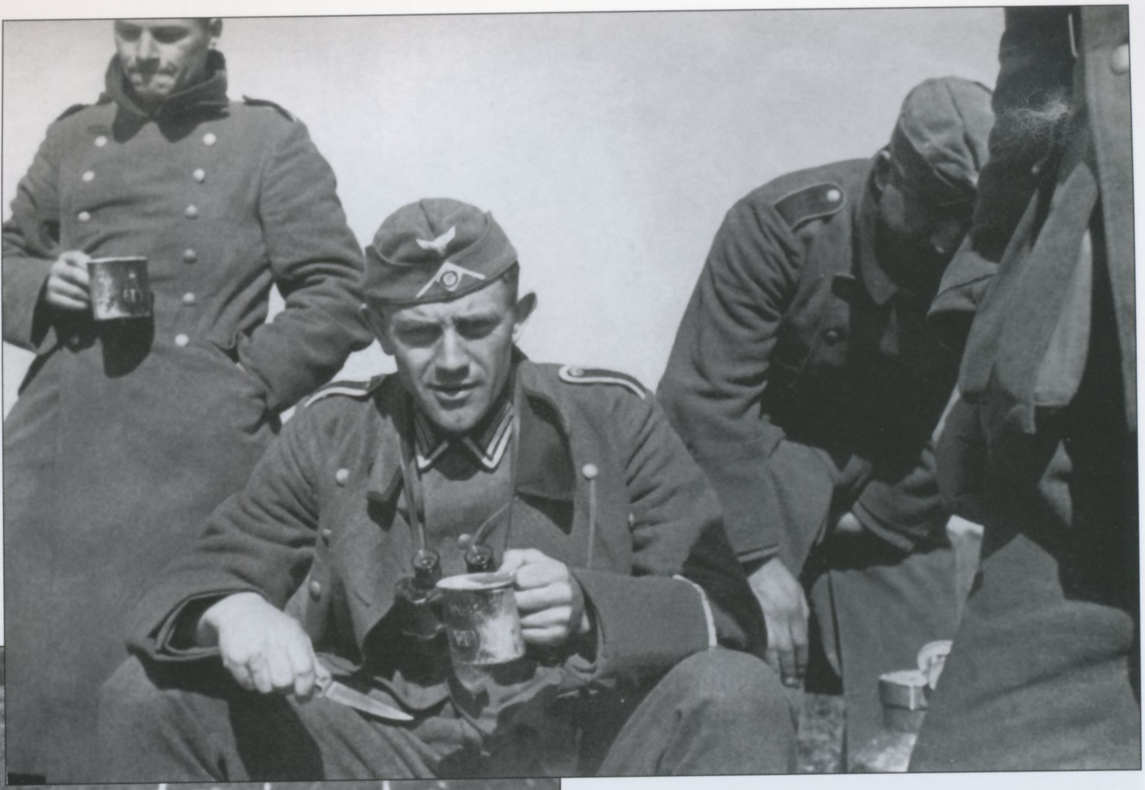
A rifle company crosses open fields in a well dispersed formation. The squads (Gruppen) move in file formation and can rapidly deploy into line formation. The file was the easiest to control and allowed for the fastest movement.

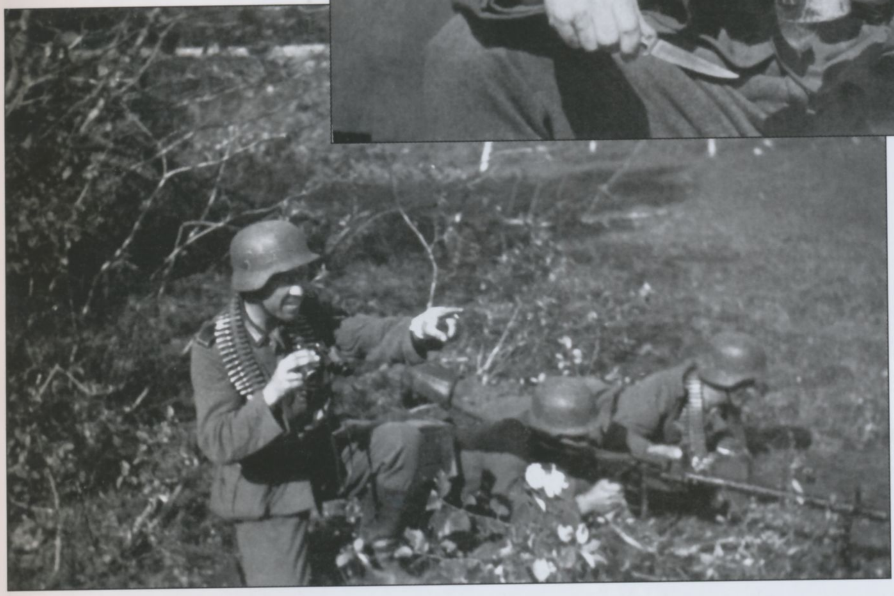
A rifle platoon (Zug) in the Stara Mountains awaits order to advance in its assault position. This would be a concealed position offering some cover from artillery and mortar fire and outside of enemy small arms range. It was here they conducted final preparations and received any updated orders after the unit leaders conducted a final reconnaissance of the objective and its approaches. In the cold weather they wear only greatcoats with their dark green collars turned up.



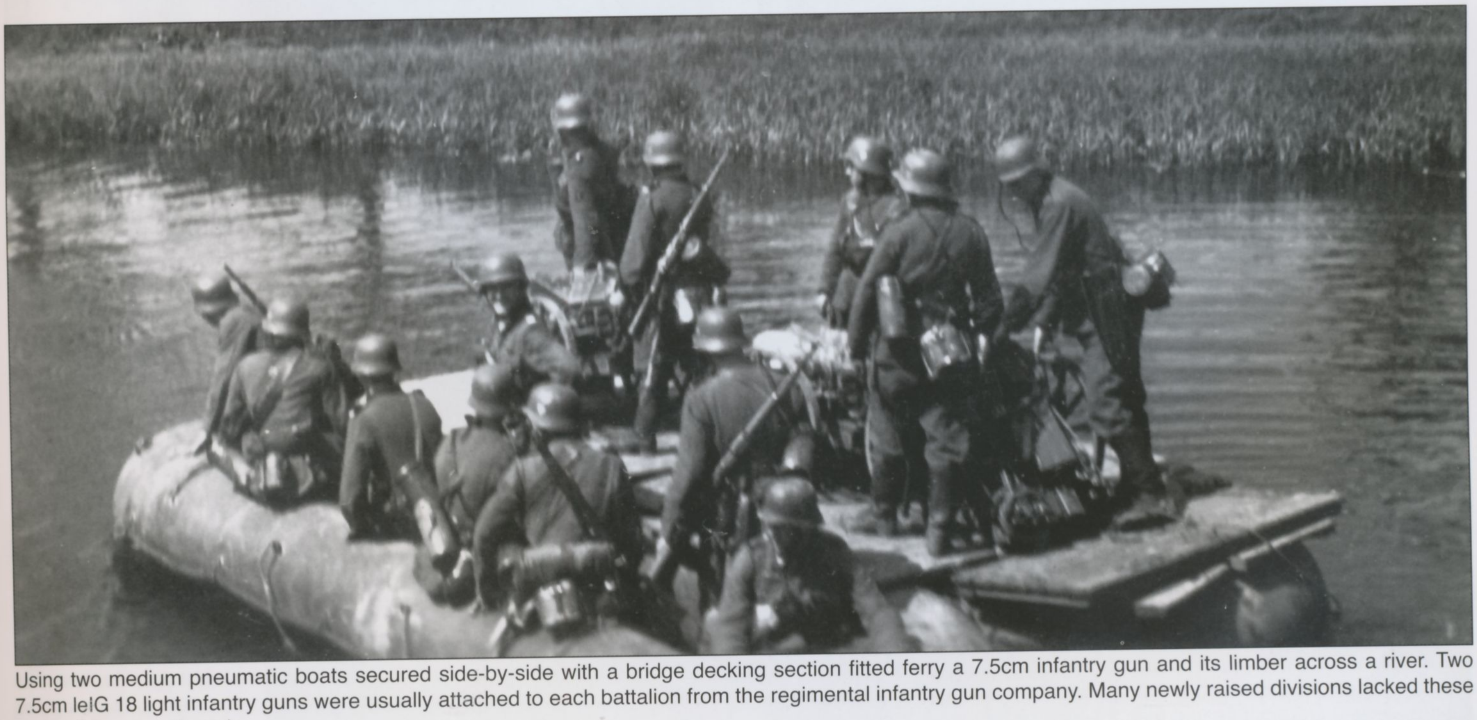
This mud-splattered infantry NCO carries a pair of 6x30 universal binoculars (Einheits-Doppelfernrohr) around his neck and a field pocket lamp (Feldtaschenlampe—flashlight) attached to his great coat button. The infantry wore white Waffenfarbe on the shoulder straps and in the form of a chevron on this M38 field cap, which was worn until 1942.

An infantry Unteroffizier, typically the rank of a squad leader (Gruppenführer), enjoys a coffee from his water bottle's cup. Most German soldiers carried a pocket knife as a utility tool. The big turn back cuffs of the greatcoat were commonly used to carry documents as can be seen in the NCO's left cuff. This might be a unit roster, guard duty assignments, or even a letter from home.

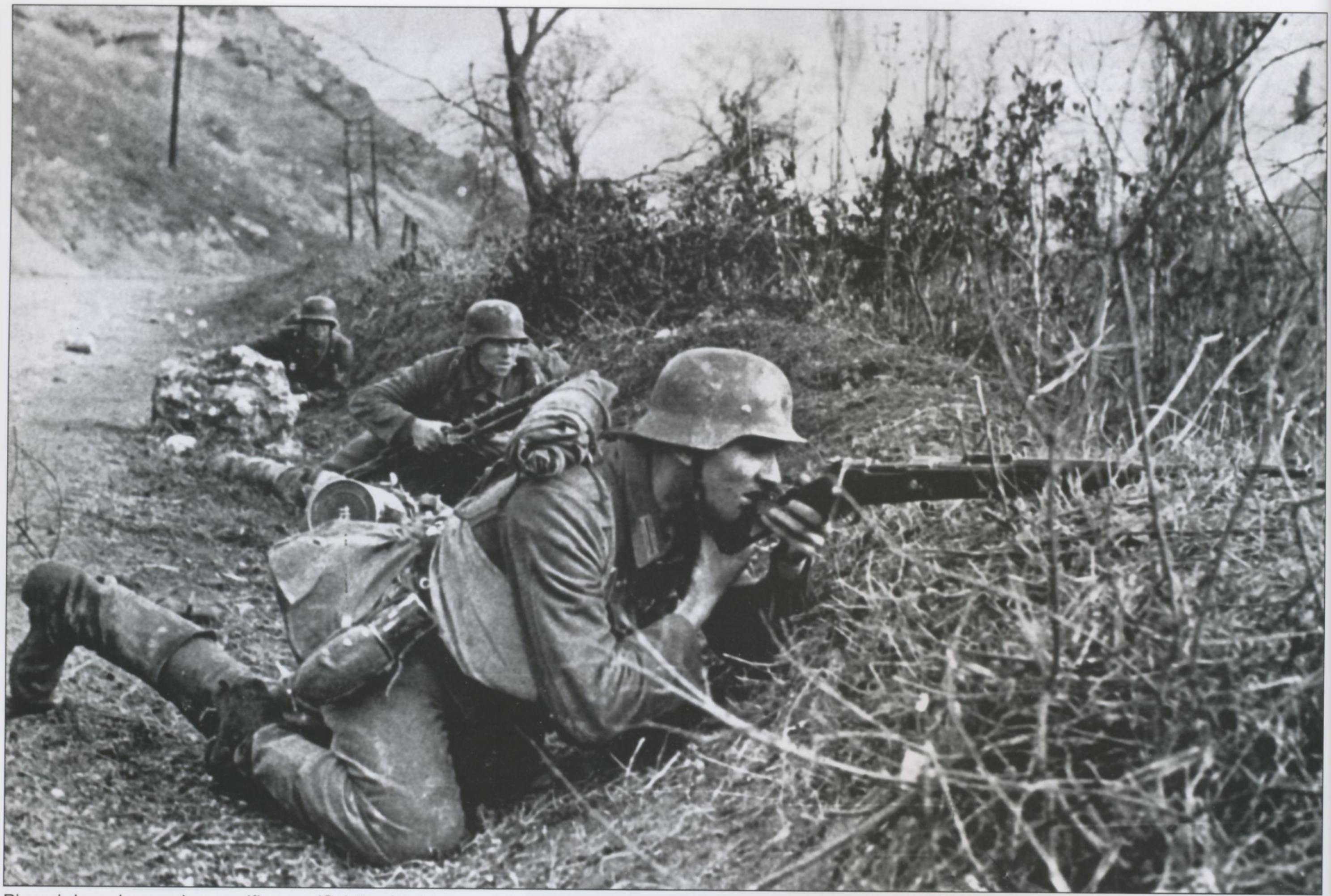




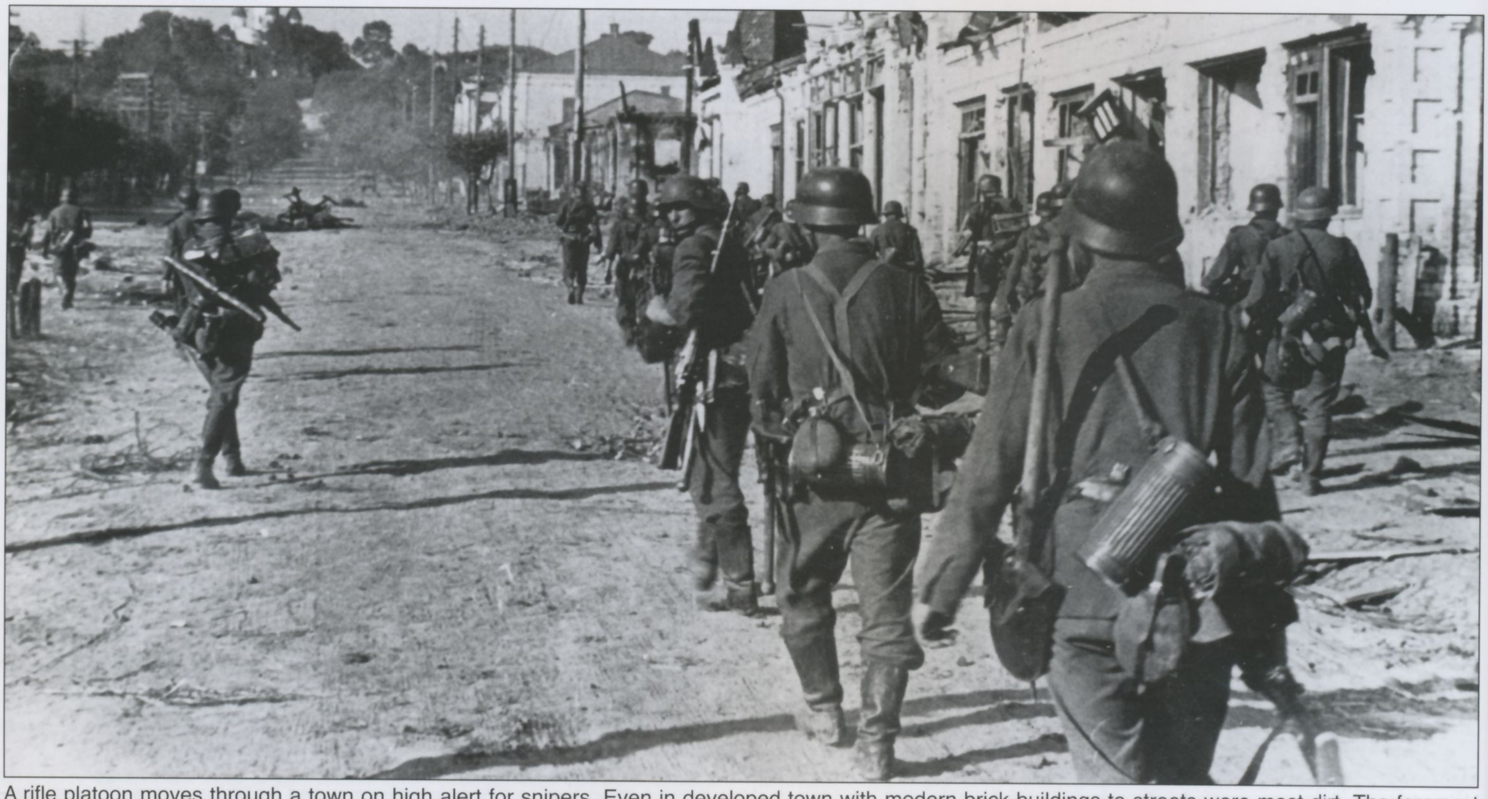
A 7.9mm MG34 light machine gun crew prepares to engage a target directed by an NCO aspirant (Unteroffiziersanwärter); identifiable by a braid loop at the bottom of this shoulder strap.



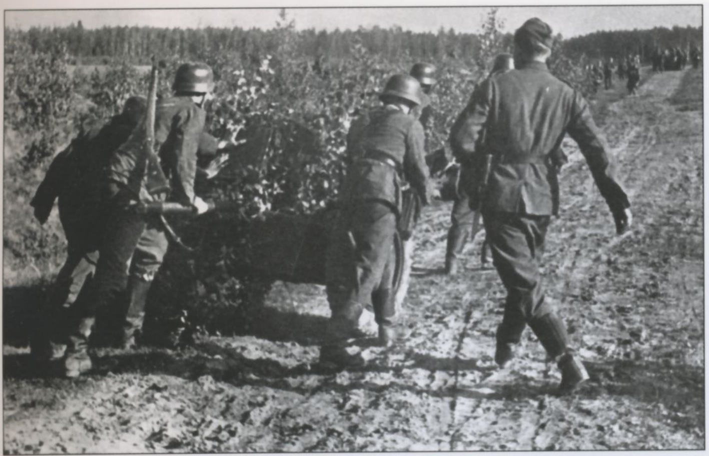
Using two medium pneumatic boats secured side-by-side with a bridge decking section fitted ferry a 7.5cm infantry gun and its limber across a river. Two 7.5cm leIG 18 light infantry guns were usually attached to each battalion from the regimental infantry gun company. Many newly raised divisions lacked these support weapons though.



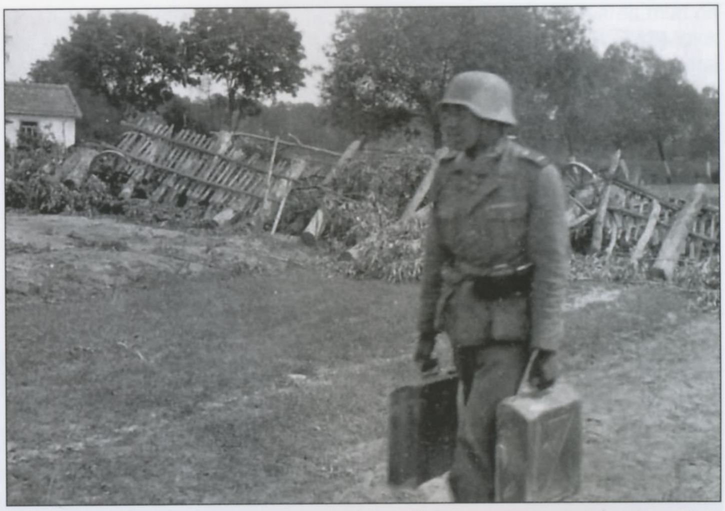
Pinned down by a sniper, a rifleman (Schütze) takes careful aim at a suspected position with his 7.9mm Kar98k carbine, what the soldier colloquially called a "Gewehr" (rifle), Mauser Büchse (an old term for a firearm), Mauser Karabiner, Flint (shotgun), or Knarre (an old term for a gun). He wears sack-like hand grenade carrying pouches on his chest; a pair of bags slung over the back of the neck and secured by a waist cord across the back. Four or five stick grenades could be carried in each bag.



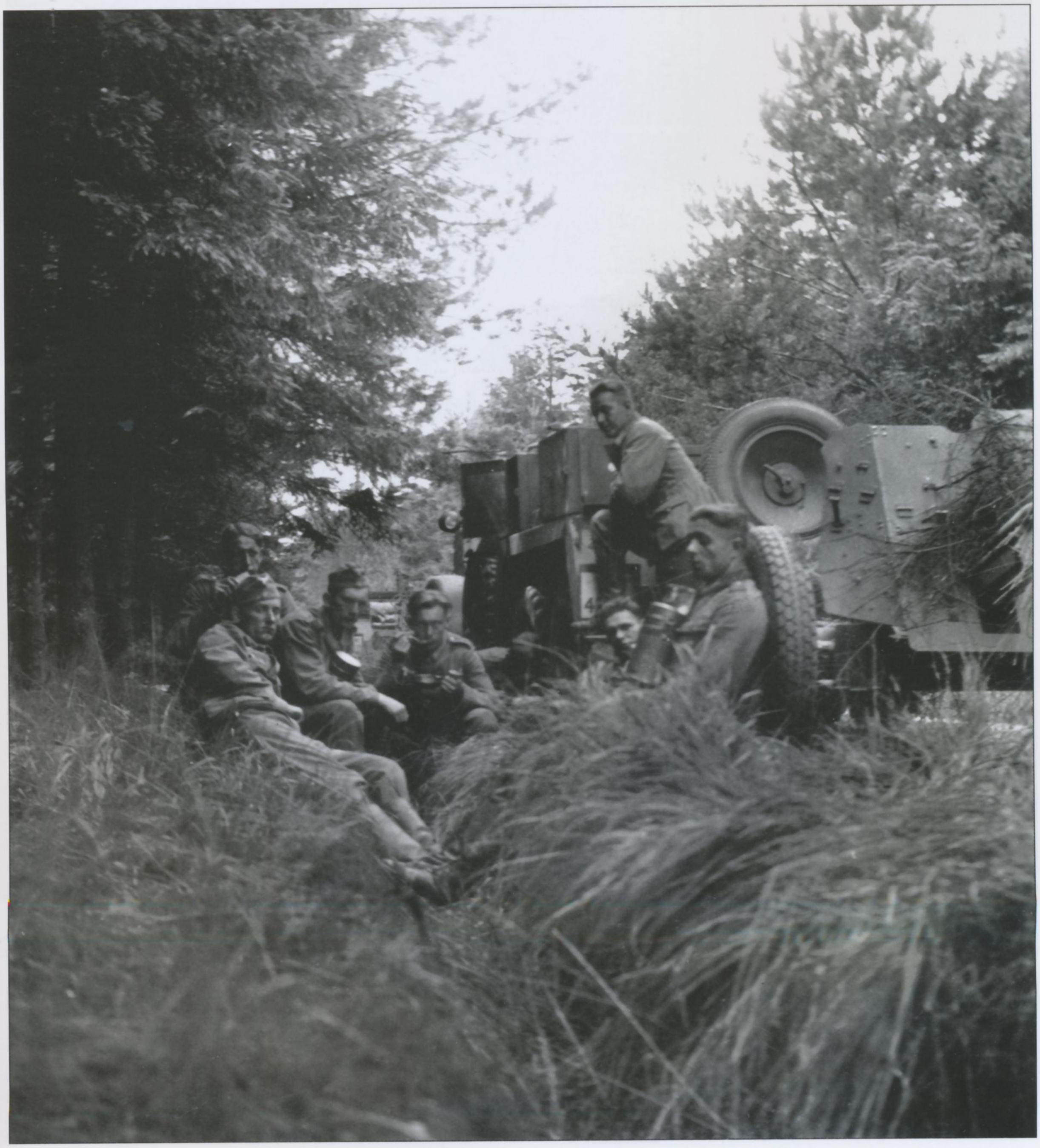
A rifle platoon moves through a town on high alert for snipers. Even in developed town with modern brick buildings to streets were most dirt. The foremost rifleman to the right carries a pioneer spade in its brown leather case. The handle could be detached from the handle for more compact carrying. This provided a more efficient entrenching tool than the small infantryman's spade.



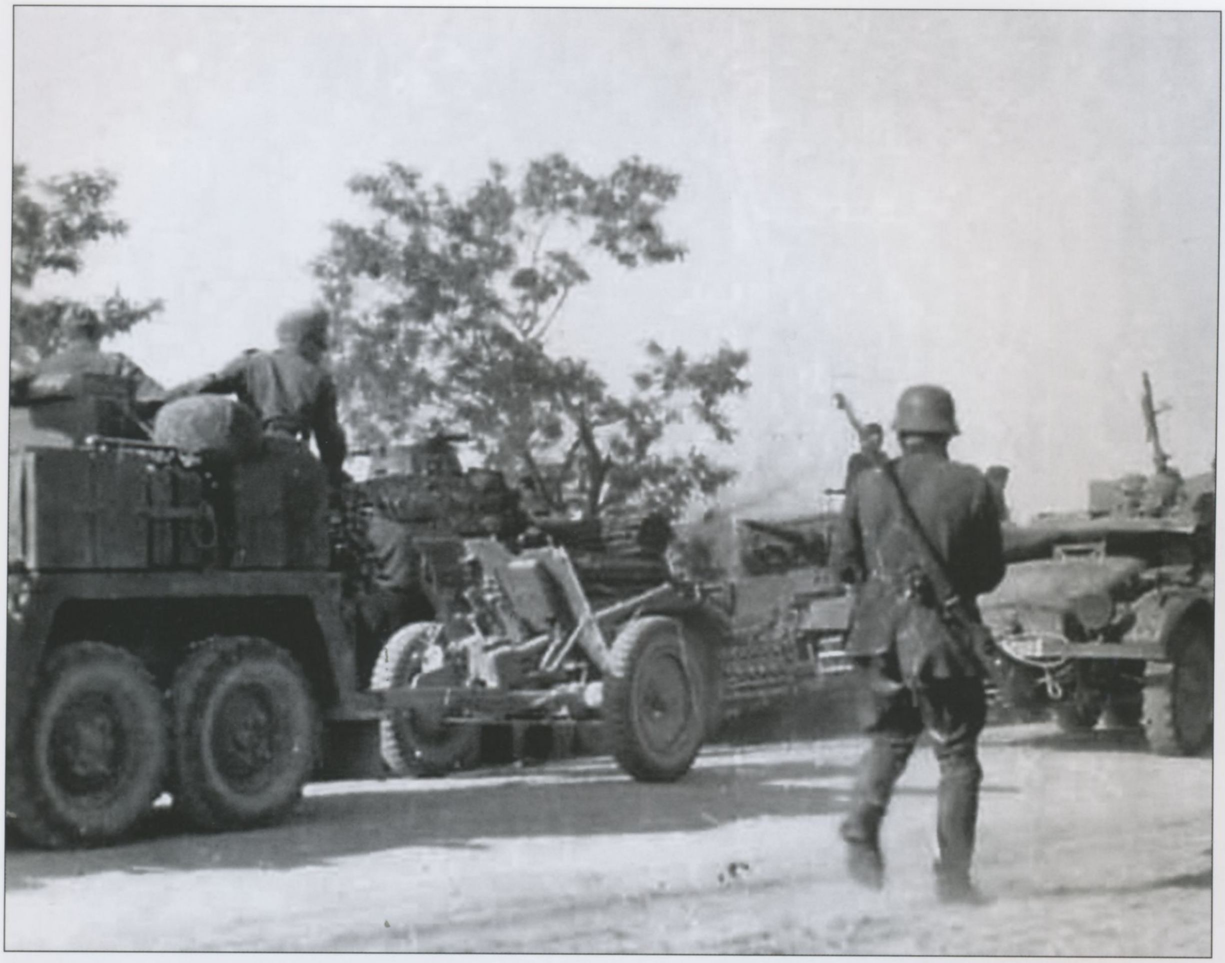
The crew of a 3.7cm Pak35/36 antitank gun manhandle their piece forward. Crews were provided heavy duty hauling slings, broad leather or canvas belts with a large clip aid in hauling wheeled crew-served weapons including the 7.5cm infantry gun. Antitank guns were man-hauled to keep pace with infantrymen to be immediately available when needed, not just for antitank defense, but to reduce lightly fortified fighting positions.



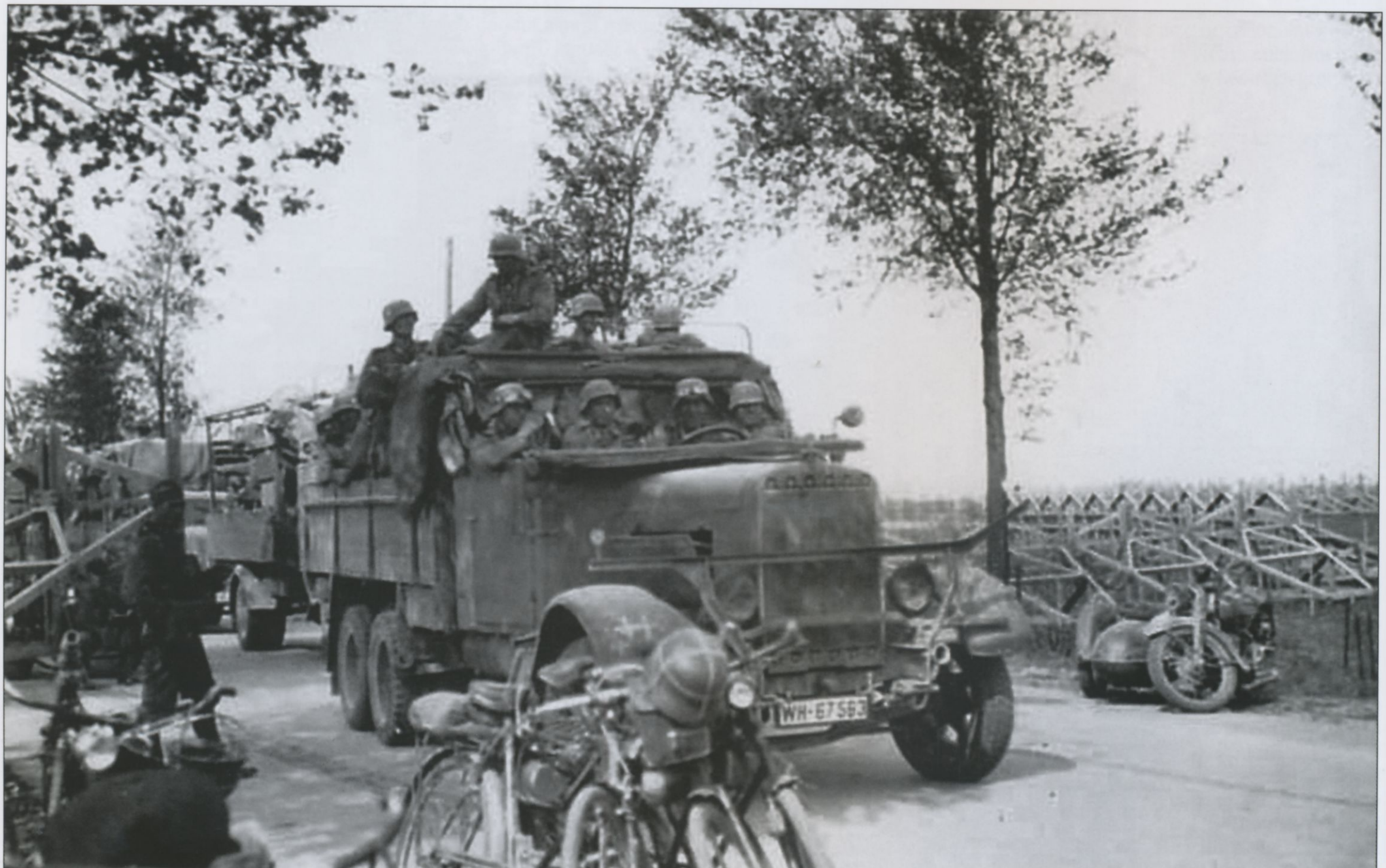
A 3.7cm antitank gun crewman, an Unteroffiziersanwärter, carries two cans of ammunition up to his gun's position. Each airtight metal container held 12 rounds. In the background is a roadblock constructed by the Yugoslavian Army and built of fencing, wagons, logs, timbers, and tree limbs.



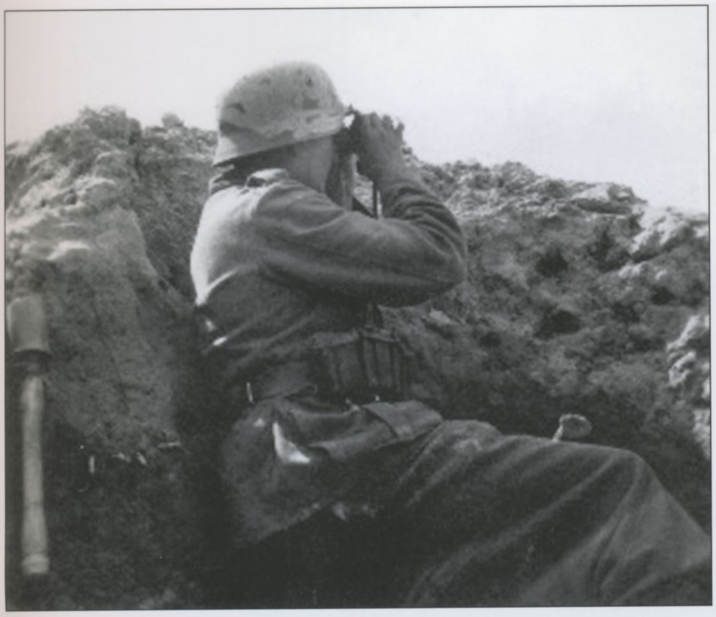
The crew of a 3.7cm Pak35/36 *antitank gun* rests during a motor march break. The prime mover is a 1-ton Krupp-Protze Kfz 69 (Protze = limber). It carried the crew, had ammunition boxes mounted on the sides, and a spare tire for the antitank gun can be seen mounted on the vehicle's rear.



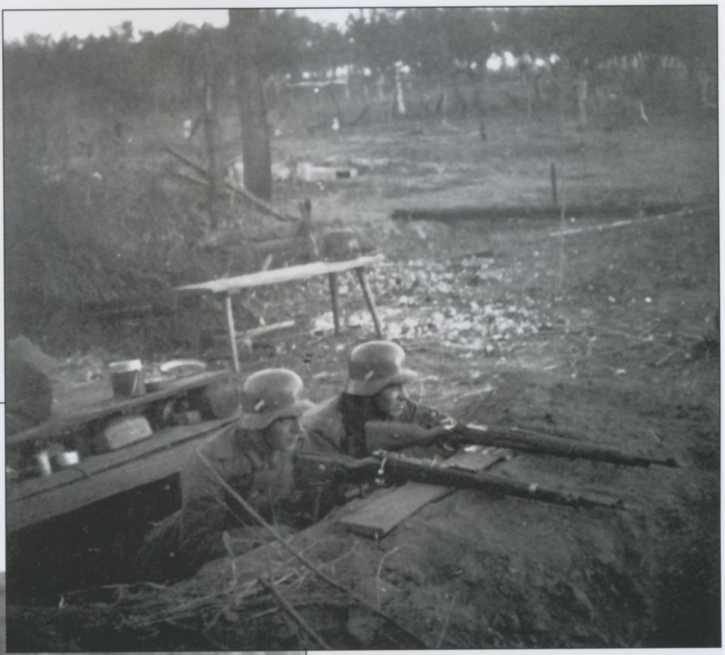
Krupp-Protze rolls past towing a 3.7cm Pak35/36 while a second vehicle follows with an MG34 machine gun mounted for antiaircraft defense. Each three-gun antitank platoon was assigned a machine gun.



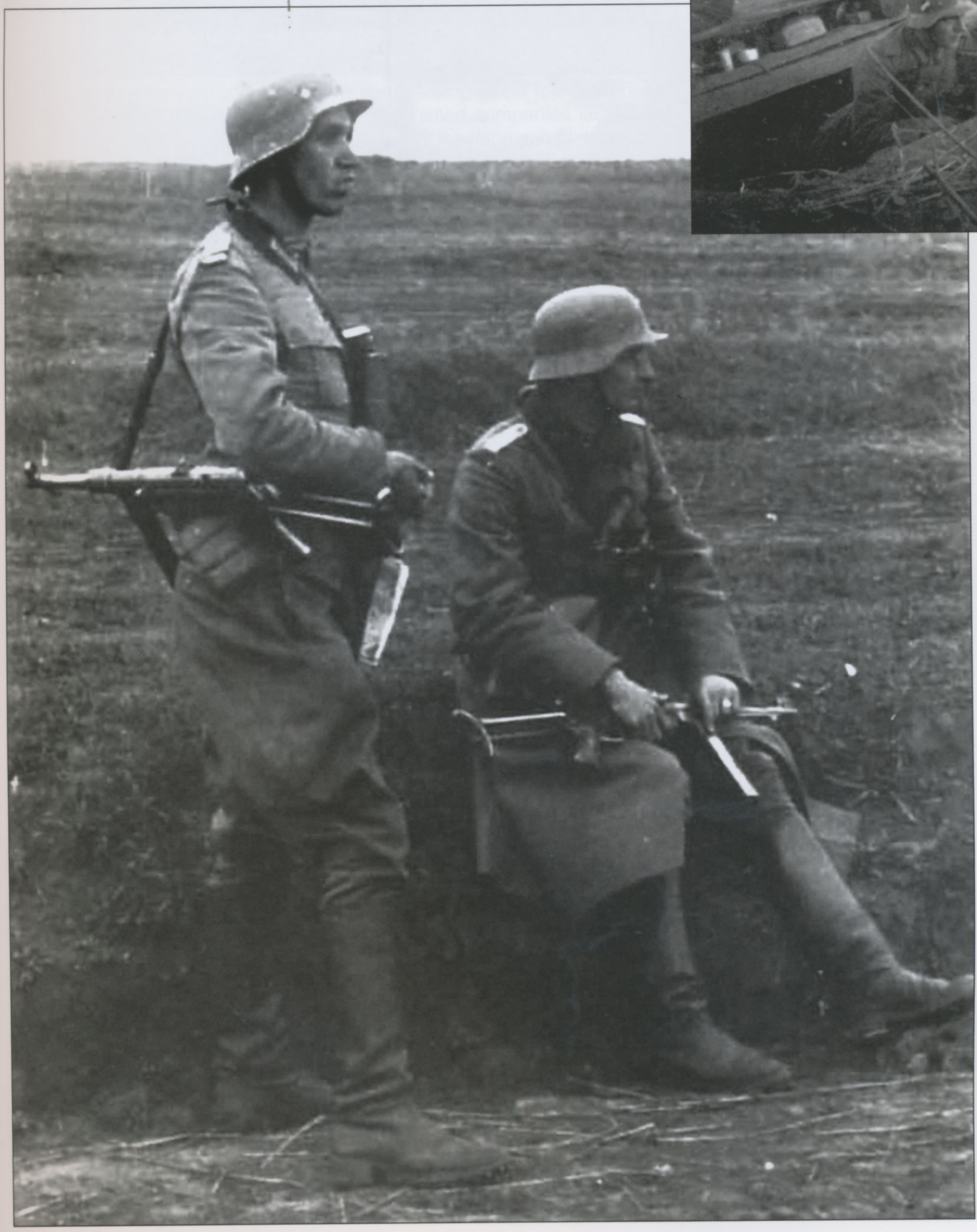
Infantrymen are transported forward aboard heavy trucks. They pass through steel antitank barriers similar to the Belgium element C barriers near the Yugoslavian frontier. The two dull yellow plus signs (+) on the truck's right fender may be the insignia of 60.Infanterie-Division (motorisiert).



An NCO scans the terrain for enemy movement. He had smeared mud on his steel helmet as an expedient camouflage. To the right is a Stg24 stick hand grenade (Stielhandgranate 24). This was the most used of several different standard German grenades and known as a "potato-masher" (Kartoffelstampfer) or "door-knocker" (Türklopfer) as it was used to "announce" one's entry into a building. It contained 6 ounces (165 grams) of TNT in the field gray head. It was operated by unscrewing the end cap on the wooden handle, which revealed a pull-ring. Pulling the ring ignited a friction fuse with a 4-5-second delay.

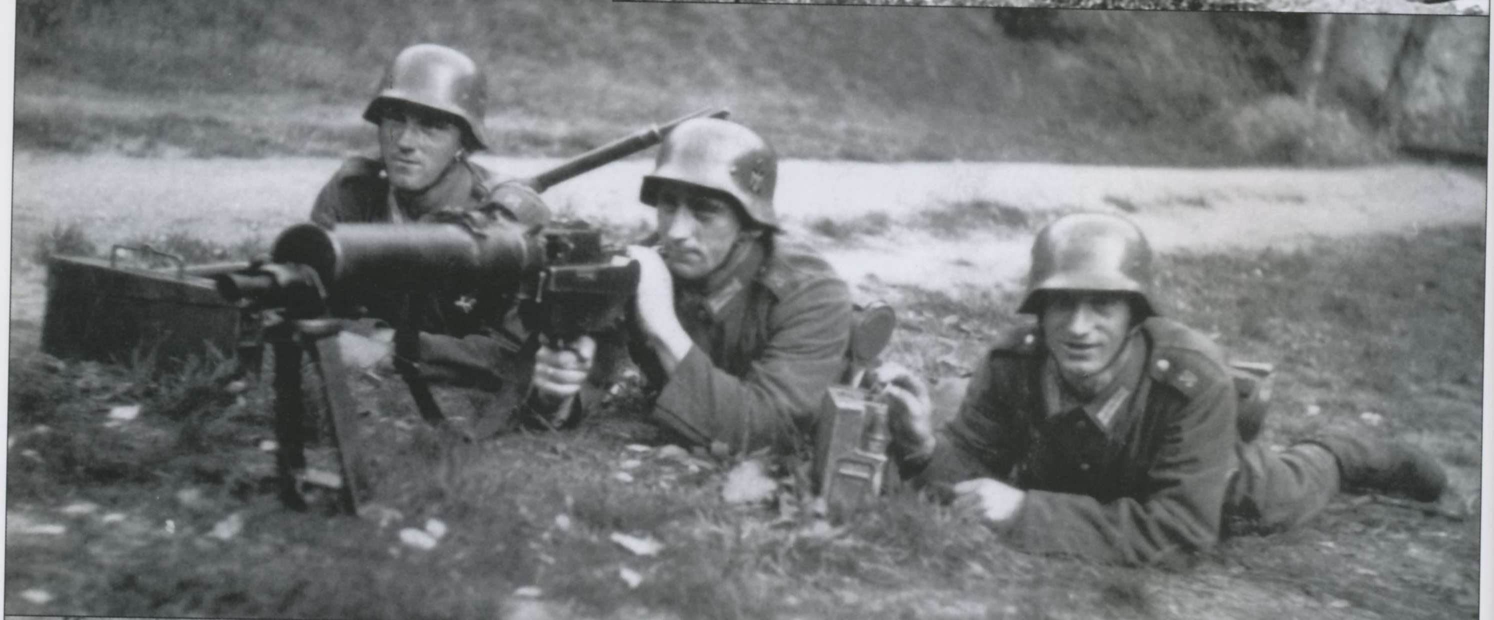


A two-man rifleman's fighting position. In the position's rear they have dug a two-man dugout shelter (Unterschlupfe), which Landser called a Hotel, kleines Haus (small house), or Wohnbunker (dwelling bunker). A shelf has been fitted over the dugout's entrance where canned food and a loaf of bread are stowed.

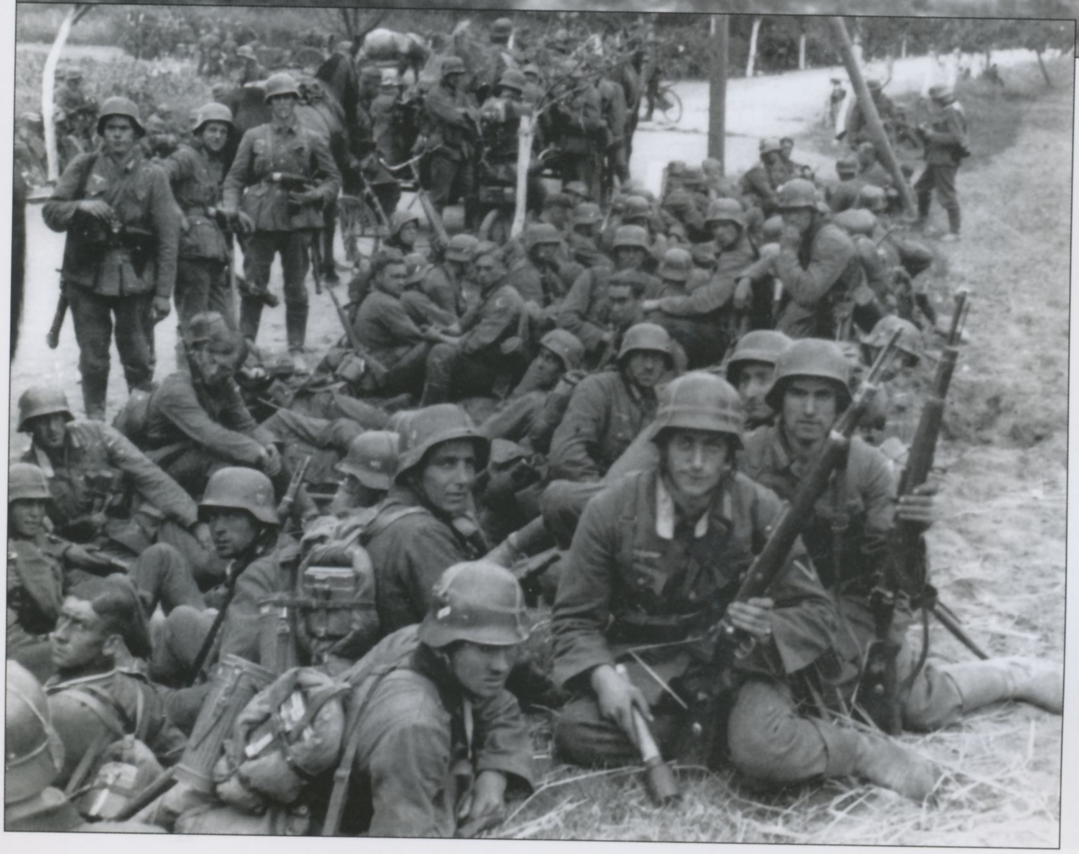


An NCO and a Leutnant armed with 9mm MP40 machine pistols. They are probably a leader of the platoon troop and assistant platoon leader (Führer des Zugtrupps und stellvertretender Zugführer) and platoon leader (Zugführer). The latter would also be armed with either a 9mm P08 Lugar or P38 Walther pistol. Machine pistol-armed men were authorized two three-pocket magazine pouches for the 32-round magazines, but owing to shortages they often only carried one pouch. Not only were there shortages of pouches, but of magazines too.

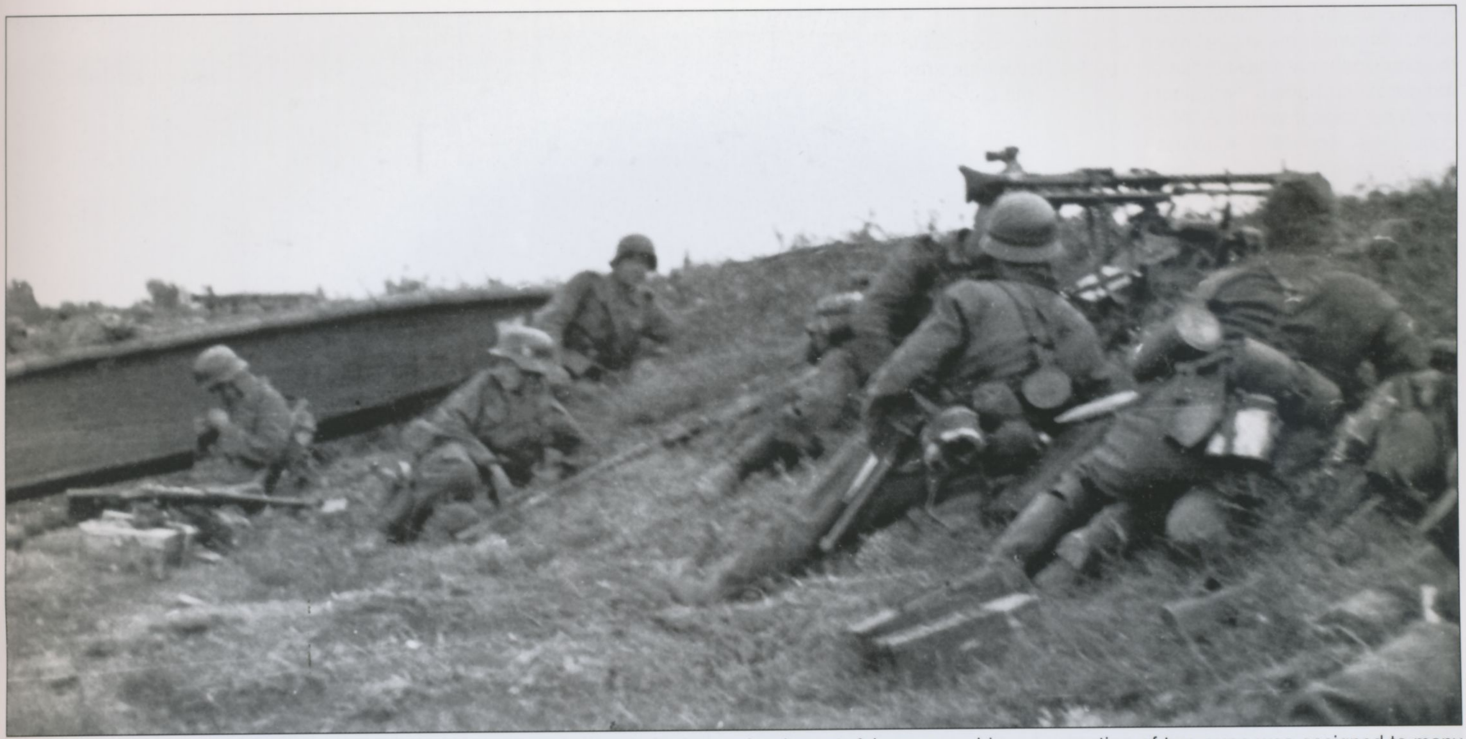
A road shortly after it was bracketed by artillery fire. A pioneer trudges up the road with a small pioneer shovel. On the roadside are abandoned troop bicycles (Truppenfahrrad 38). Most Fahrräder were painted field gray, but black was also a common color.



Owing to the early war shortage of MG34 machine guns some units were issued obsolete World War I 7.9mm MG08/15 machine guns. This was the "light" version of the Spandau MG08 heavy machine gun with modifications to the receiver and water jacket and the addition of a shoulder stock, pistol grip with trigger, and bipod. Normally the bipod was fitted to the water jacket just forward of the receiver. The metal box with the man to the right is the water container. The regimental number is embroidered in white on their white-piped shoulder straps.

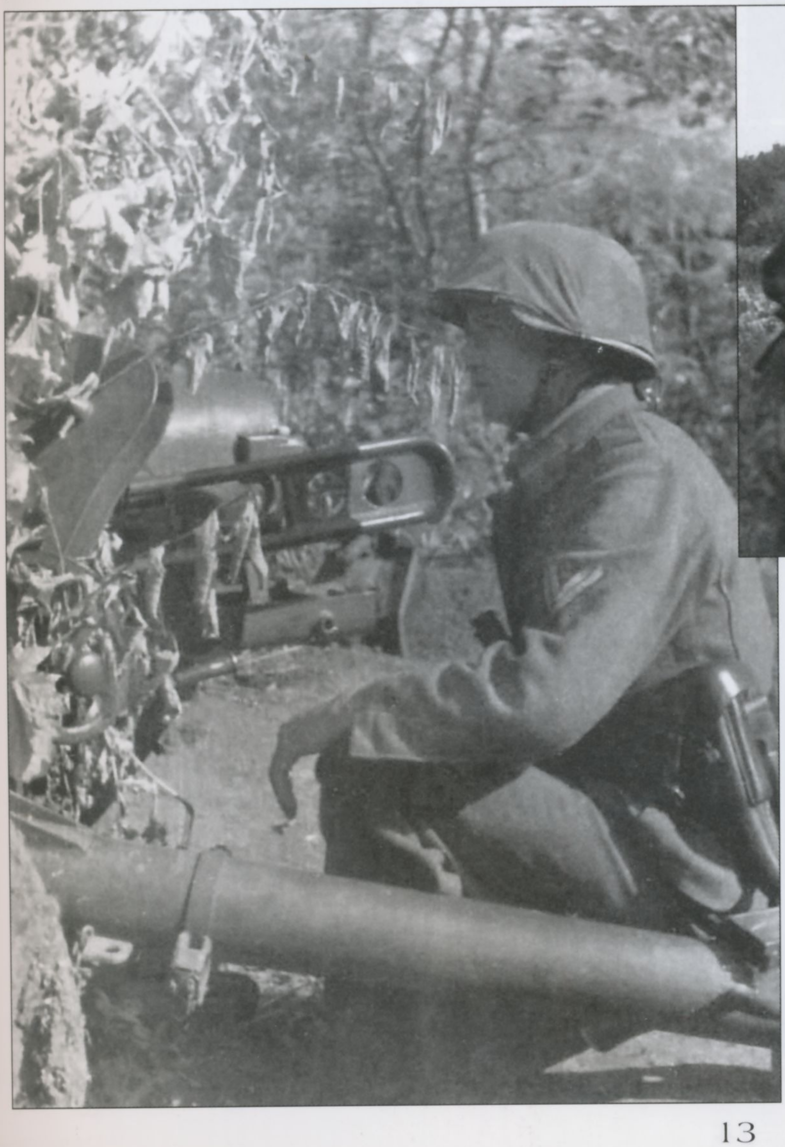


A rifle company (Schützenkompanie) awaits orders to move out. Many of the troops have some form of ad hoc camouflage retaining bands on their helmets to hold vegetation. These are usually made of twine. Note the Zeltbahnen secured in a "donut roll" around their mess kits on the back of their belt support straps.



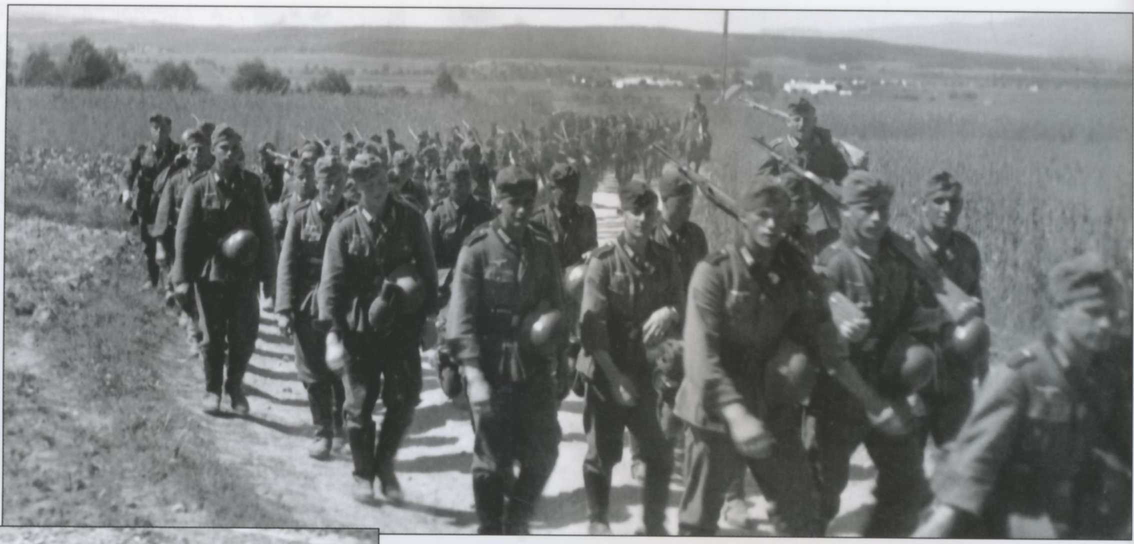
A 7.9mm MG34 heavy machine gun crew rests staying below the sheltering embankment. A heavy machine gun section of two guns was assigned to many rifle companies at this time, although recently raised companies lacked them. They later disappeared altogether as manpower dwindled. The battalion machine gun companies had three four-gun heavy machine gun platoons, along with a platoon of 8cm mortars. Heavy machine guns differed only from light machine guns in the role they played. The heavy guns were provided a tripod mount, long-range optical sight, and additional spare barrels to allow them to provide long-range sustained fire.

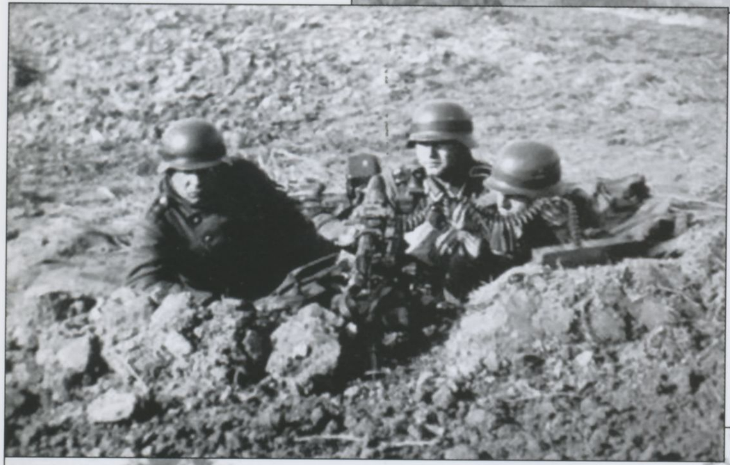
Infantry troops take an hourly rest break on their way to the front. In hot weather they were permitted to march with their helmets slung on their belts and were even allowed to remove their field caps, open collars, and unbutton tunic cuffs.



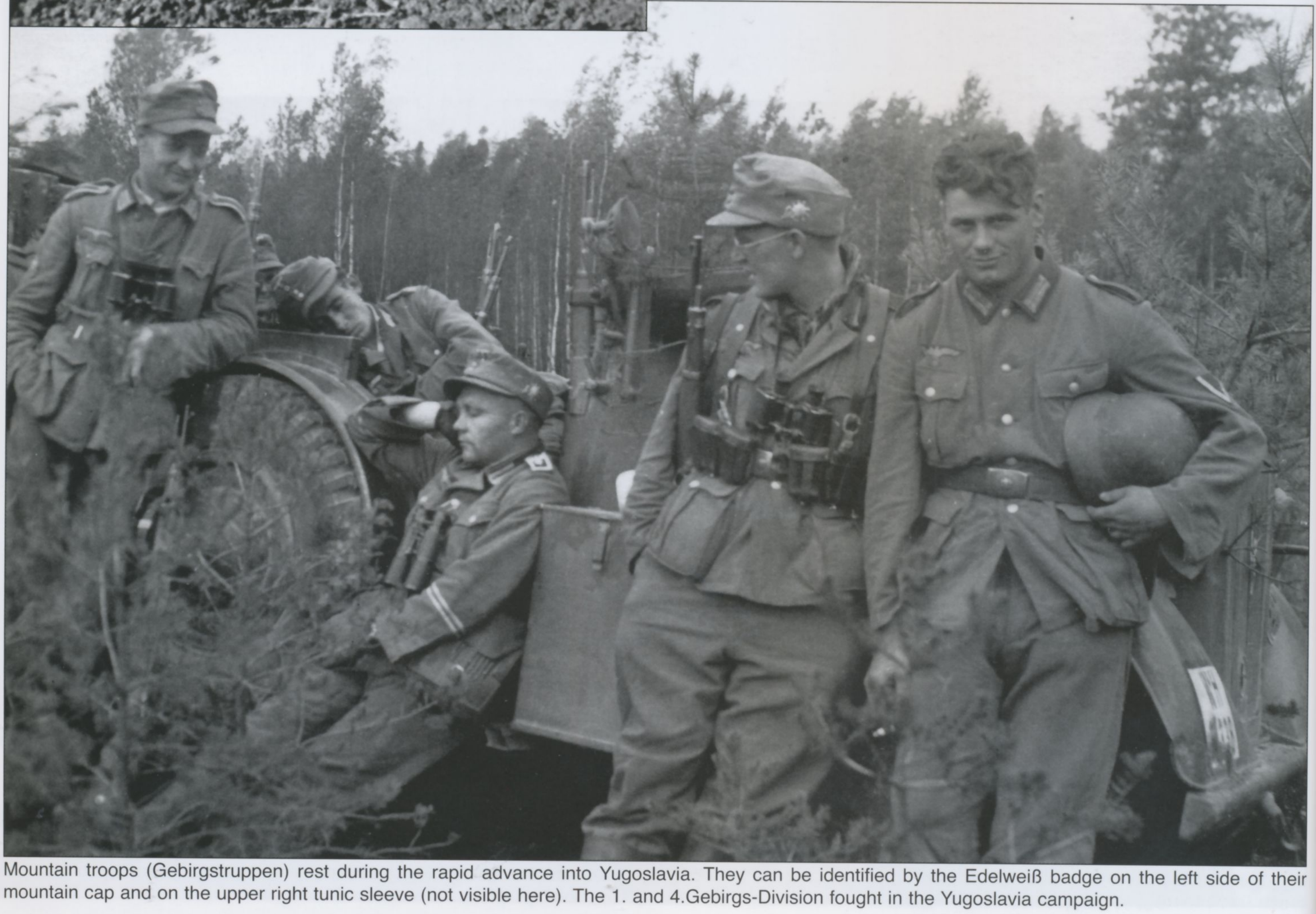
This Stabsgefreiter gunner of a 5cm Pak38 antitank gun awaits action beside his well camouflaged gun. Note the spaced shield designed to improve ballistic protection without increasing weight. On his hip he wears a 9mm P08 pistol holster. Pistols were habitually worn on the left hip.

A rifle company marches to the front. All units of an infantry division rode on trucks, cars, motorcycles, horses, wagons, and carts, except for the 27 rifle companies and nine machine gun companies, they walked. Their packs, machine guns, and mortars were carried in company horse-drawn wagons and carts. In the background can be seen the company leader mounted on a horse, the only officer in the company authorized a mount. This longtime tradition soon disappeared owing to the horse shortages and its impracticality in modern combat.

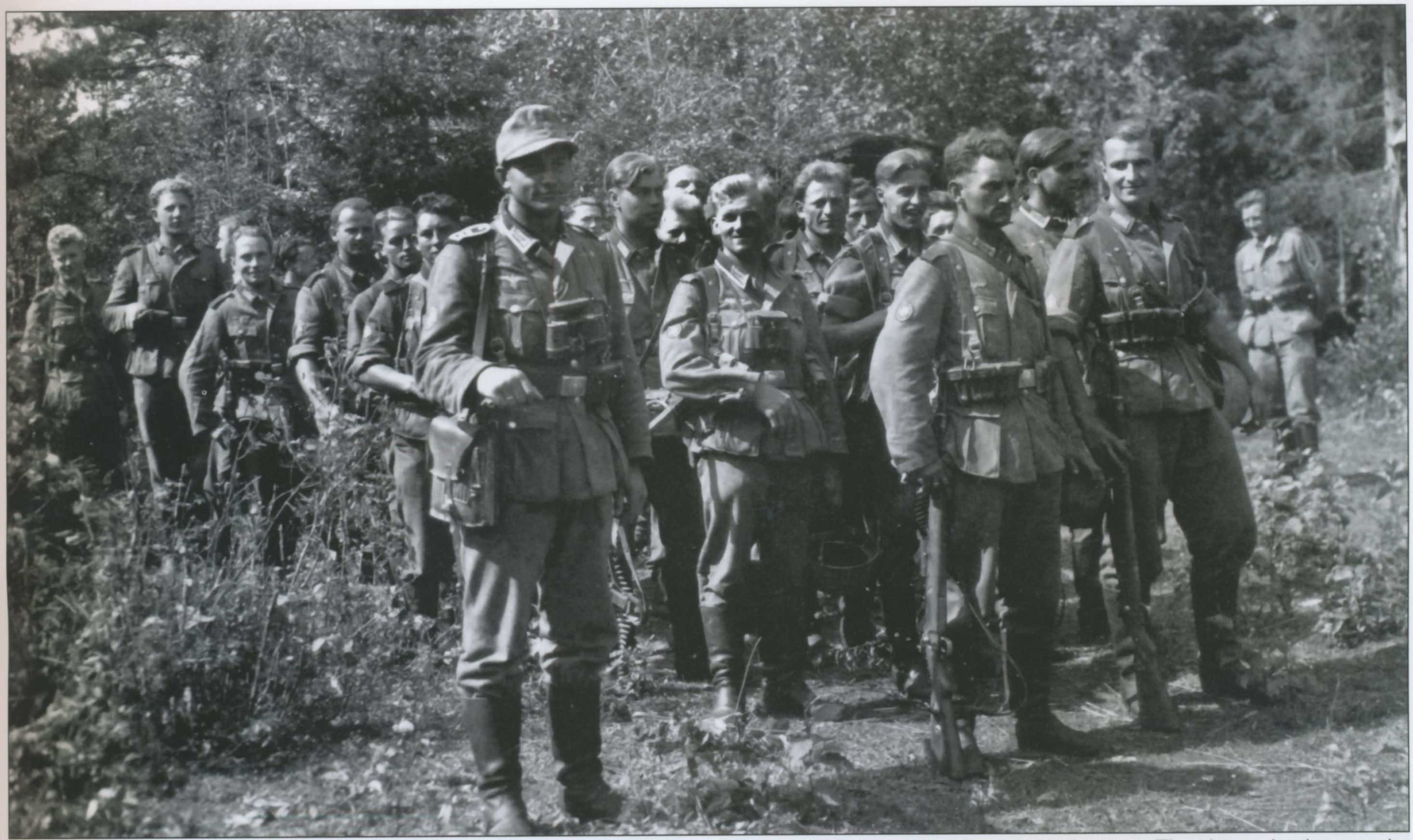




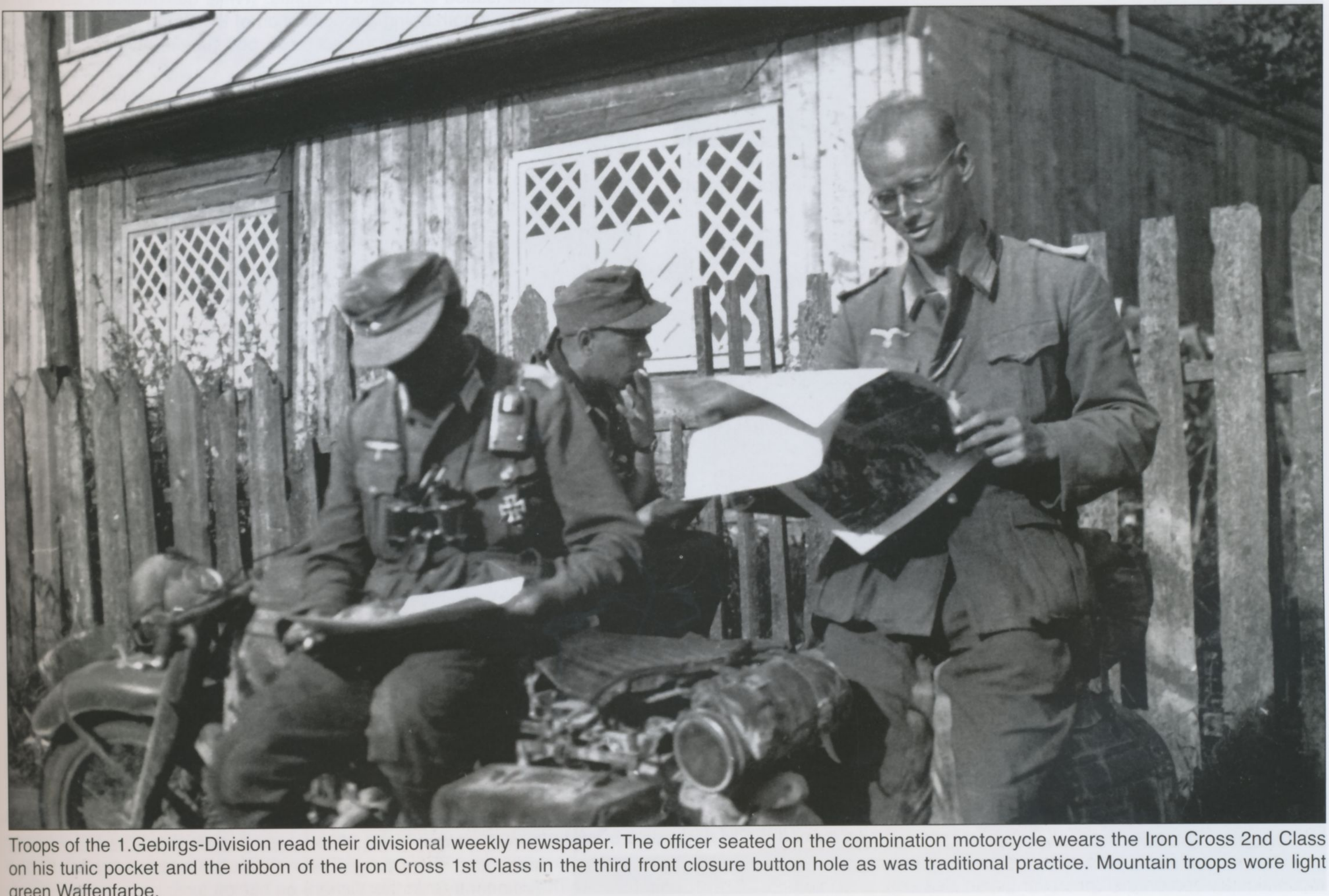
An MG34 heavy machine gun crew in a hastily dug position. Expended belts had to be retained when emptied. Machine gun ammunition was not issued belted. The crew had to belt their ammunition from supplies of loose rounds.



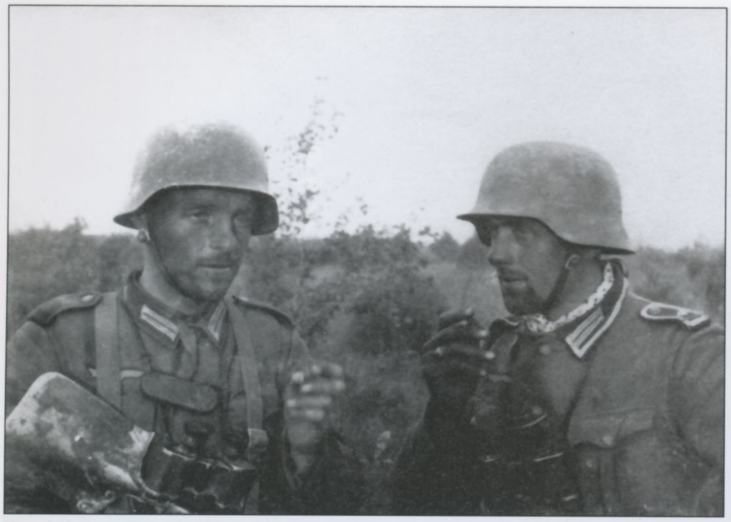
Mountain troops (Gebirgstruppen) rest during the rapid advance into Yugoslavia. They can be identified by the Edelweiß badge on the left side of their mountain cap and on the upper right tunic sleeve (not visible here). The 1. and 4.Gebirgs-Division fought in the Yugoslavia campaign.



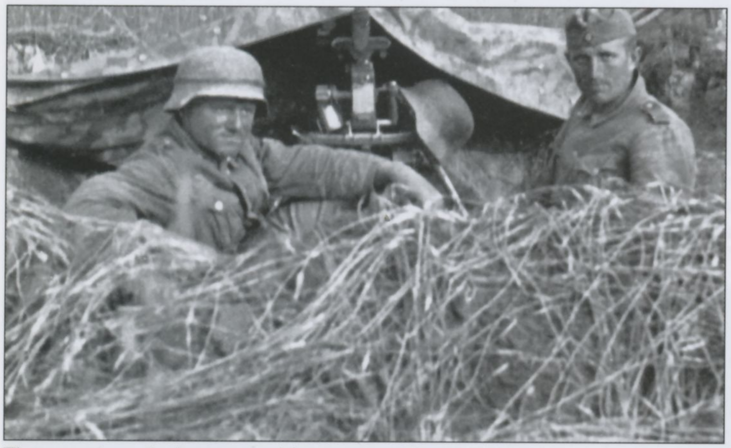
A Gebirgsjäger platoon stands ready to advance. Their embroidered Edelweiß badges on their right upper sleeves can be seen. The platoon leader, a senior NCO armed with an MP40 machine pistol, stands in the forefront. Most rifle platoon leaders were NCOs, usually with only one platoon per company being led by a Leutnant. The two carbine-armed men to the right are the platoon messengers. The Unteroffizier squad leaders, also armed with MP40s, are behind the messengers.



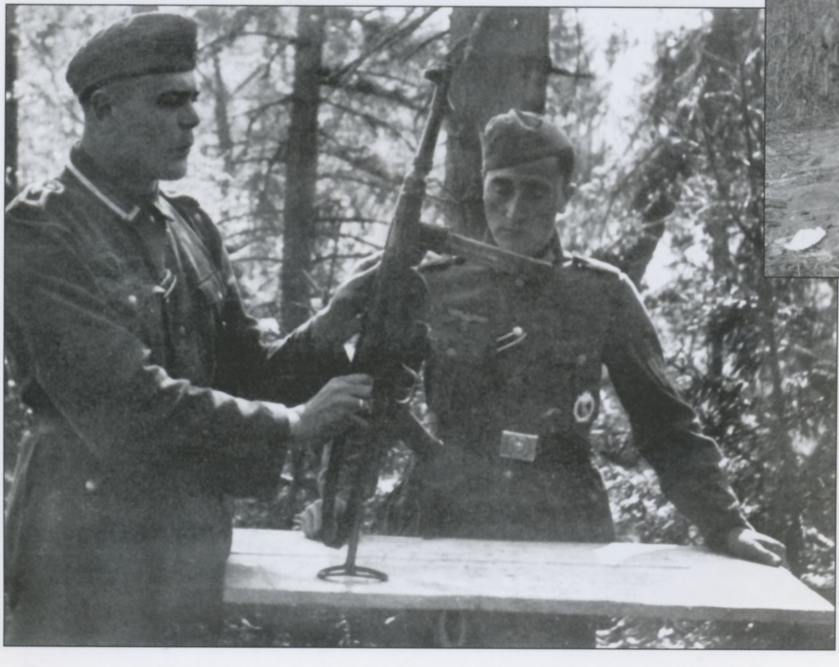
Troops of the 1.Gebirgs-Division read their divisional weekly newspaper. The officer seated on the combination motorcycle wears the Iron Cross 2nd Class on his tunic pocket and the ribbon of the Iron Cross 1st Class in the third front closure button hole as was traditional practice. Mountain troops wore light green Waffenfarbe.

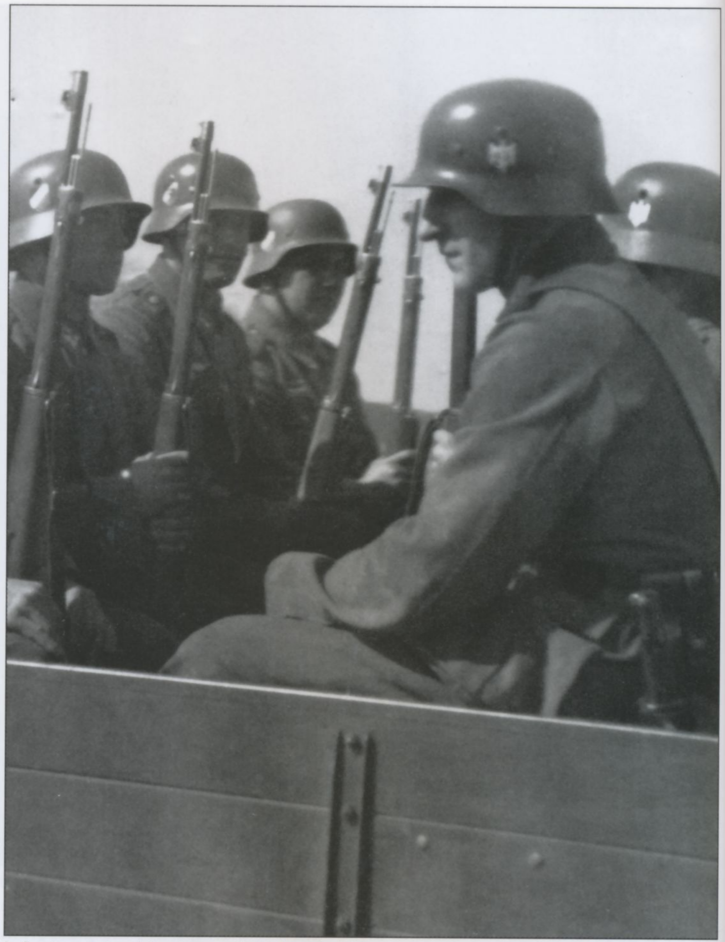


Two infantrymen share a cigarette. To the right is a Feldwebel. He wears a civilian scarf, a common practice, and were seen in all colors. The Schütze to the left carries a small entrenching tool (kleines Schanzzeug).

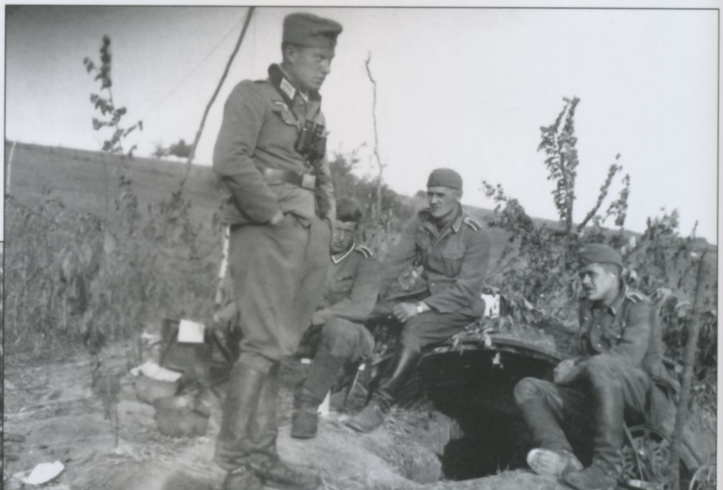


The rear view of a heavy machine gun position. A Zeltbahn covers the tripod-mounted MG34. Cut grass has been spread over the earth parapet for both ground and aerial camouflage.





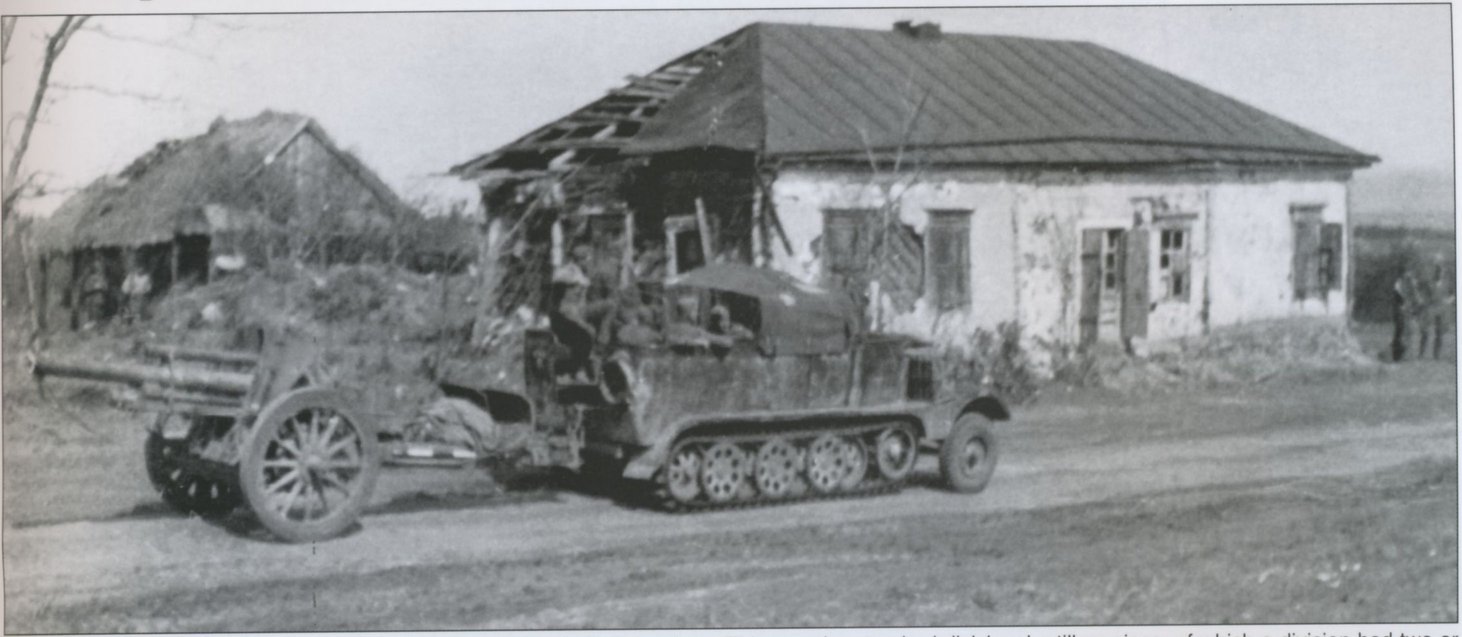
Infantrymen ride toward a front. They are armed with 7.9mm Kar98b carbines, a rifle issued to second line units. While designated a "carbine," it was actually rifle length being a modification of the World War I Gew98 rifle. The modifications included a turned down bolt handle and a modern rear sight.



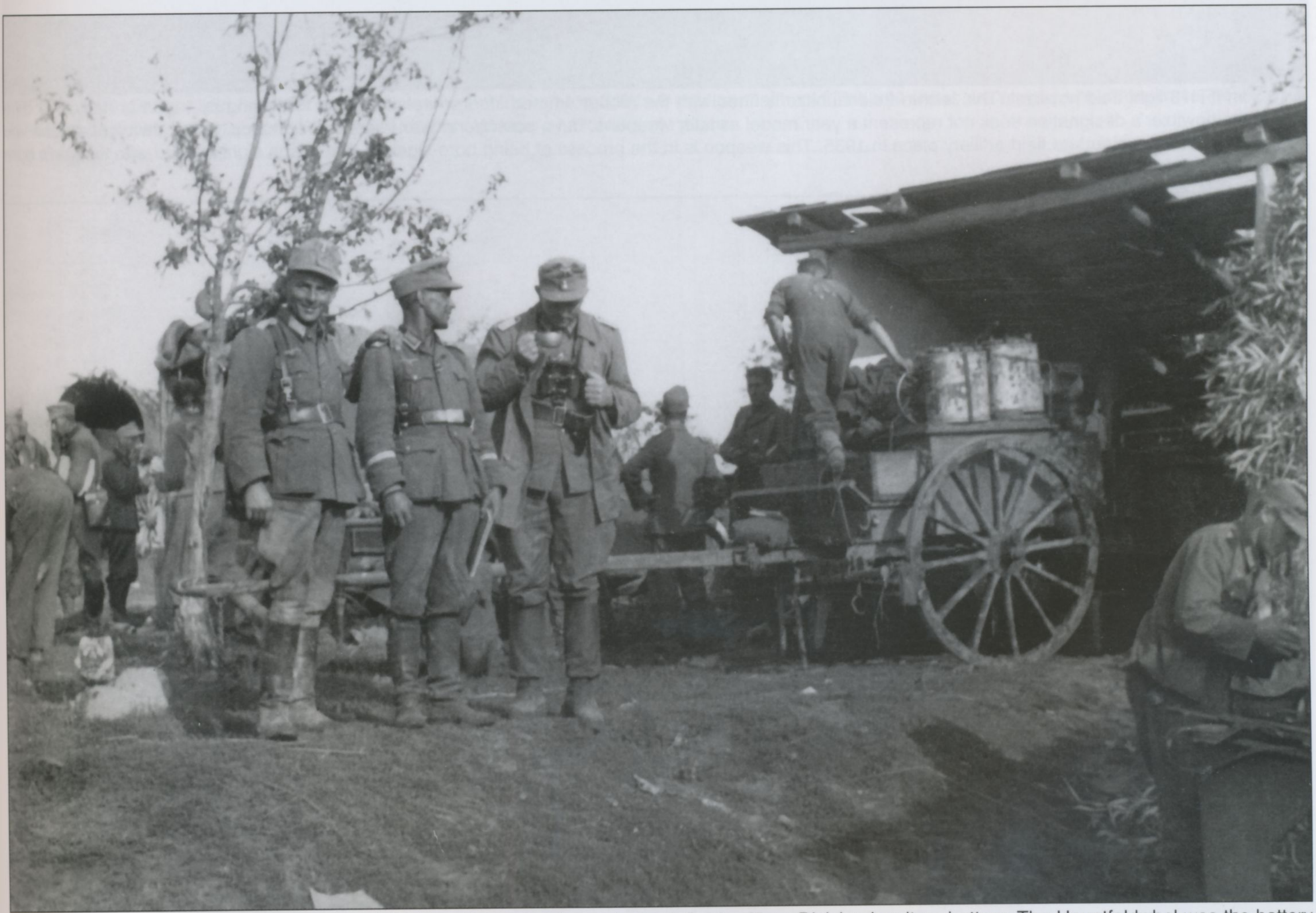
A Leutnant platoon leader talks to his three Unteroffizier squad leaders in front of the platoon command post. Note the field telephone wire reels to the right of the dugout built of steel culvert sections. Wire connected each platoon with the company command post.

A Feldwebel examines an MP40 machine pistol with a bent barrel. It takes great blow to accomplish that. The magazine is also bent. The Obergefreiter wears the Infantry Assault Badge (Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen) on his left tunic pocket.

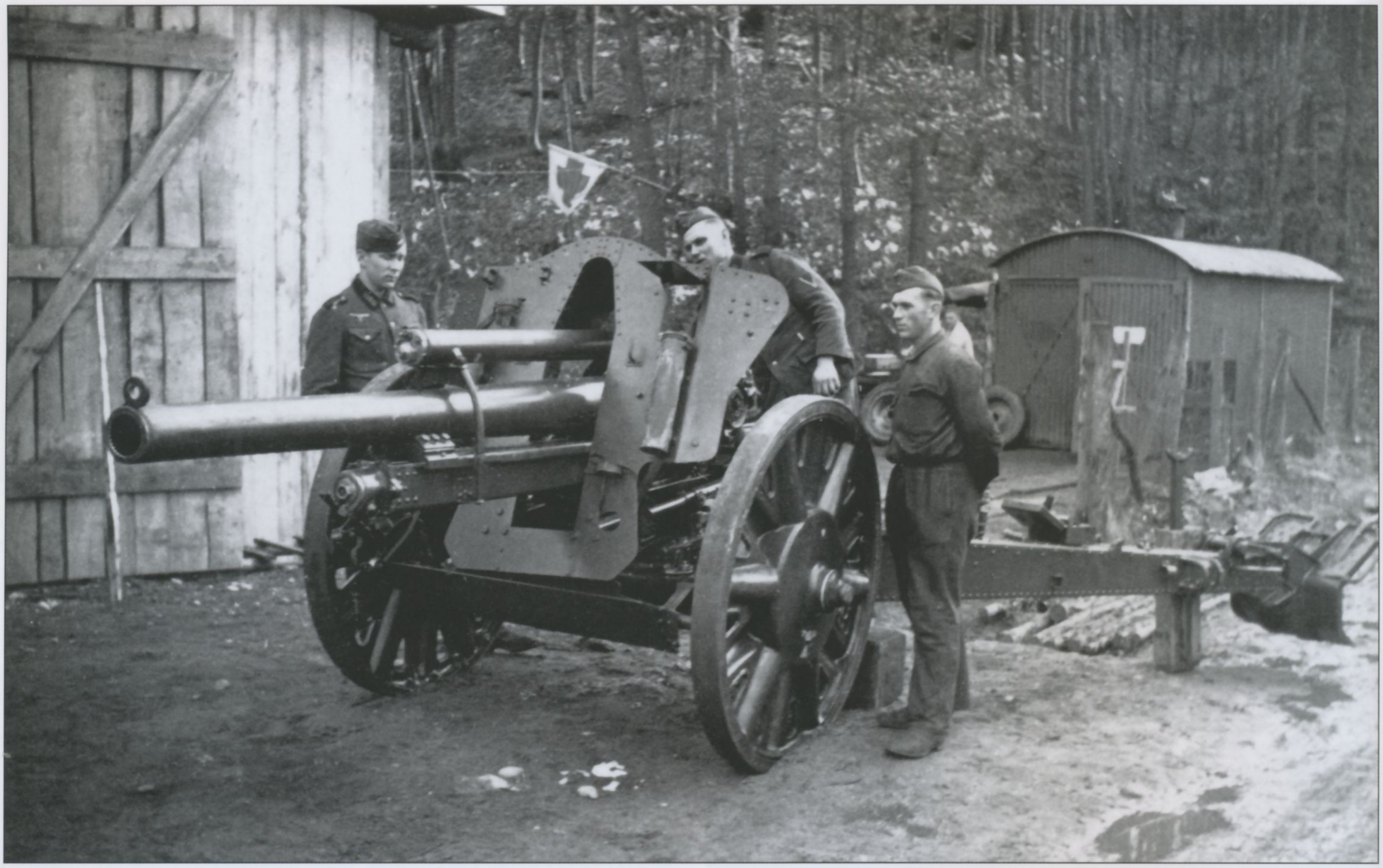
Artillery



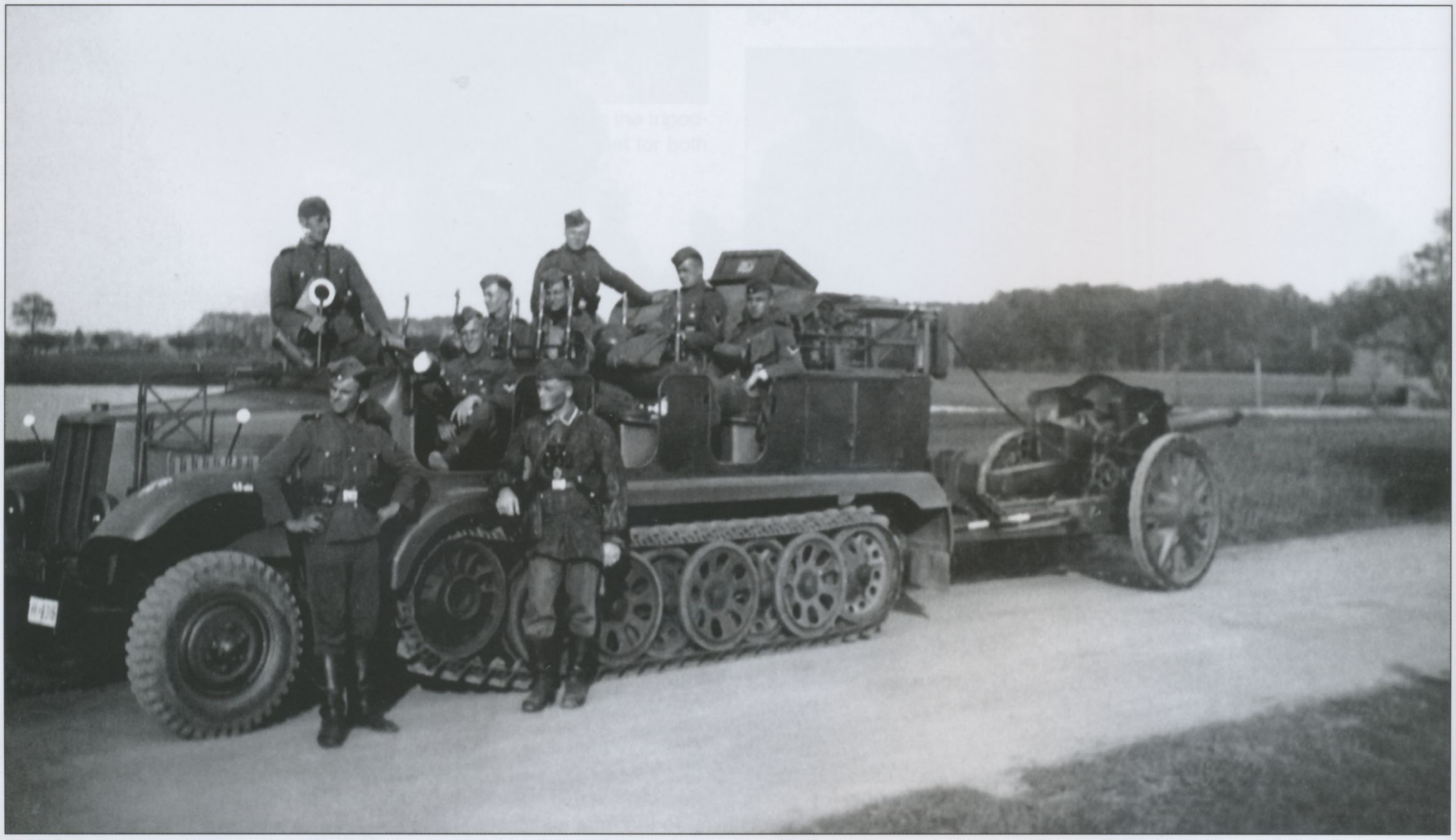
A 5-ton SdKfz 6 medium halftrack towing a 10.5cm IFH18 light field howitzer. This was the standard divisional artillery piece, of which a division had two or three 12-howitzer battalions. Panzer division artillery was halftrack drawn rather than horse-drawn as was infantry and mountain infantry division artillery. This piece is unusual in that it has the old wooden wheels rather than steel wheels with rubber tires usually equipping motorized artillery units. Note the red and white aiming stake secured to the howitzer's trail. The halftrack's passenger compartment is fitted with bows to support a canvas cover which here is partly erected.



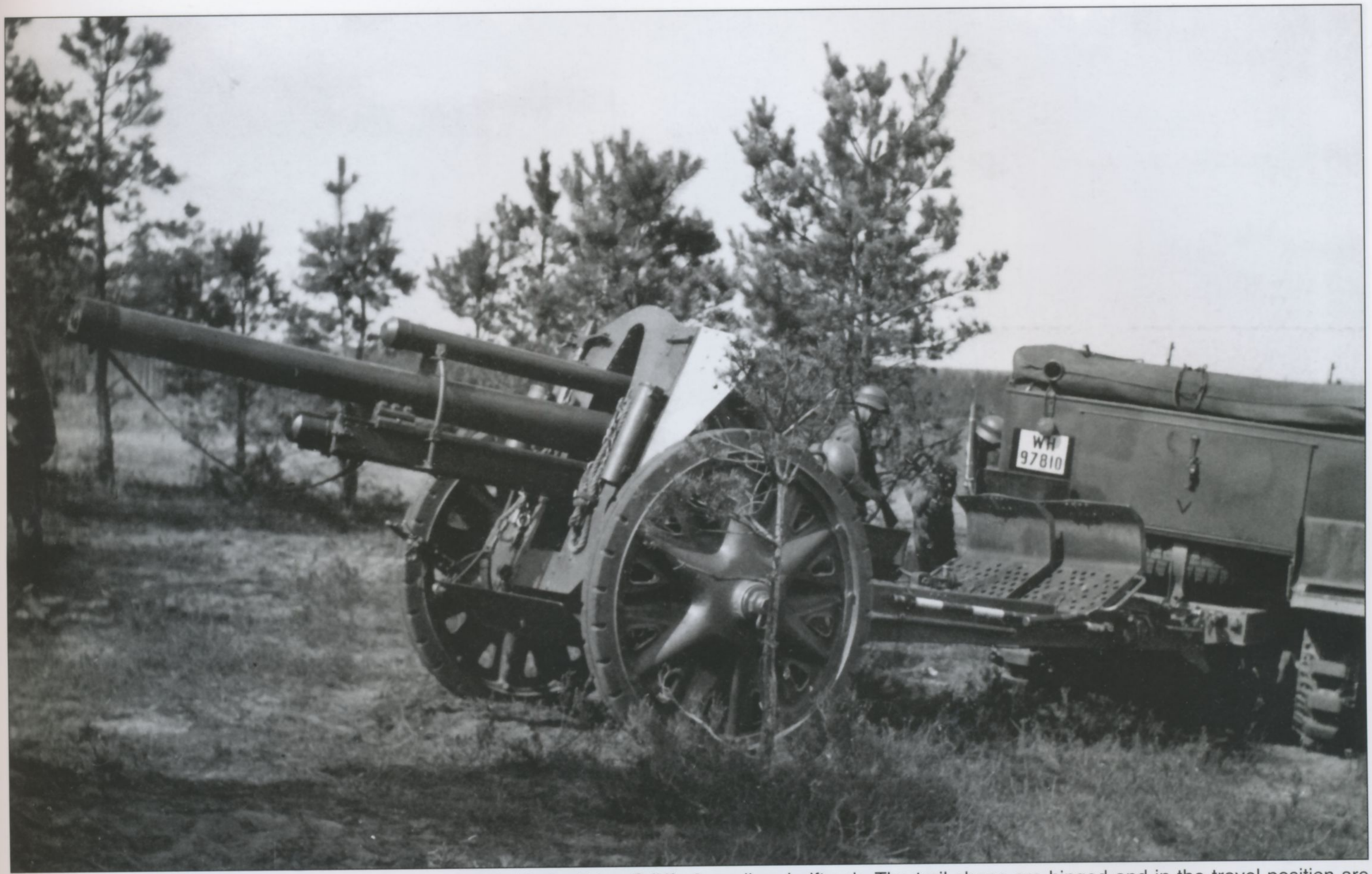
The Batterieführer (holding a coffee cup) and the Hauptfeldwebel (center) of a 1.Gebirgsjäger-Division howitzer battery. The Hauptfeldwbel was the battery reporting NCO, the senior sergeant in a company/battery sized unit and equating to the American first sergeant and the Commonwealth company/battery sergeant major. Traditionally known as des Spieß (the pike, dating from a time when NCOs carried pike to keep the troops in line), Hauptfeldwebel was not a rank, but an appointment. He could hold any NCO rank and was identified by two 9mm wide braid loops on his lower sleeves known as "piston rings" (Kolbenringe). The battery wagon is loaded with insulated food containers for delivering hot food to gun positions.



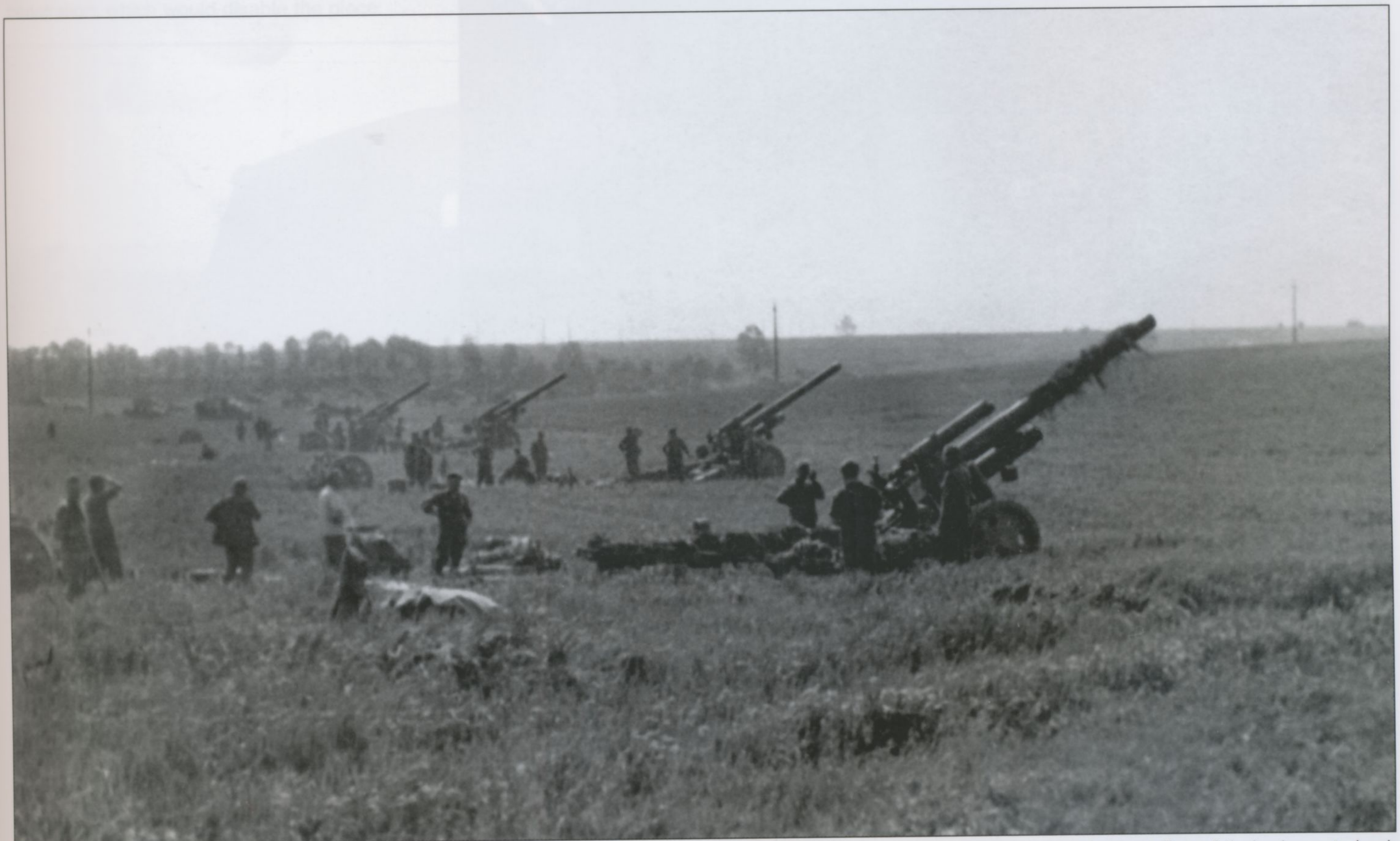
A 10.5cm lFH18 light field howitzer. This leichte Feldhaubitze is fitted with the rubber rimmed steel wheels intended for towing by trucks or halftracks. The "18" in the howitzer's designation does not represent a year model as later weapons, but a post-World War I series designation. It was developed in the late 1920s and made the standard field artillery piece in 1935. This weapon is in the process of being bore-sighted, that is, the sight aligned with the gun's bore for use when using direct fire.



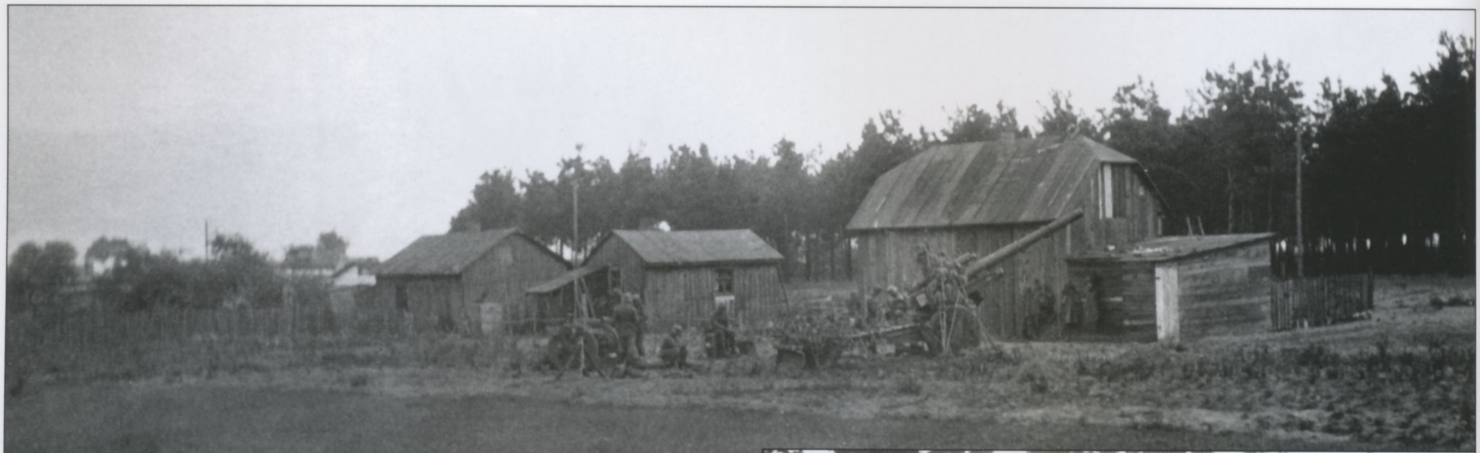
This full nine-man 10.5cm lFH18 light field howitzer crew poses aboard its 5-ton SdKfz 6 medium halftrack. The crew consists of a gun leader (Geschützführer,), seven canoniers (Kanoniere), and a motor vehicle driver for tractor vehicle (Kraftwagenbegleiter für Zugkraftwagen). The 3-ton SdKfz 11 was also used to tow the 10.5cm howitzer.



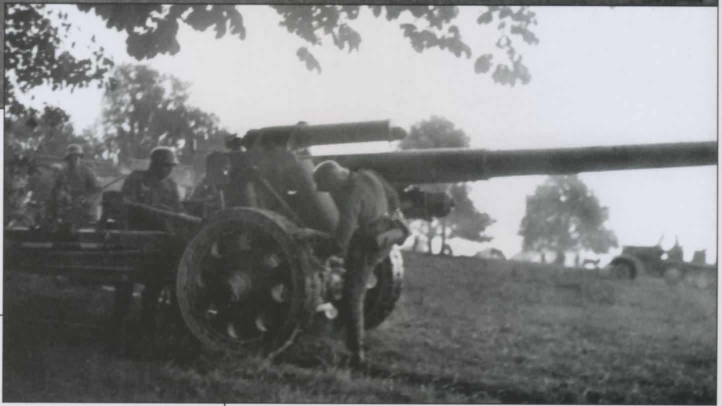
The 10.5cm IFH18 light field howitzer rigged for towing behind a 5-ton SdKfz 6 medium halftrack. The trail shoes are hinged and in the travel position are rotated forward. When emplaced the shoes are rotated rearward and locked into place.



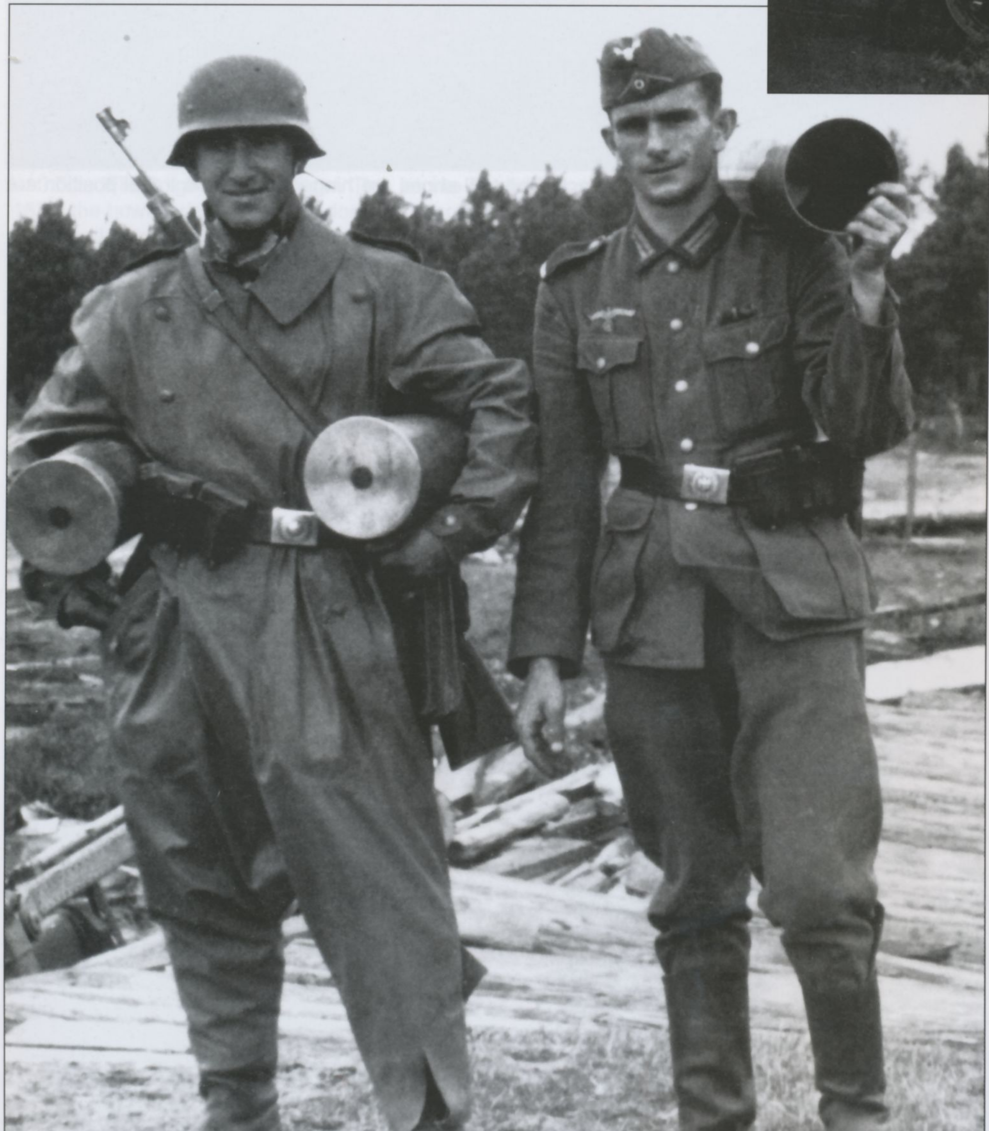
A battery (Batterie) of 15cm sFH18 heavy field howitzers (schwere Feldhaubitze) in firing position. An infantry division had a battalion of their pieces to back up the lighter 10.5cm howitzers. A divisional heavy artillery battalion (Artillerie-Abteilung [schwere]) had two batteries of 15cm howitzers and one battery of 10cm (actual 10.5cm) longer ranged guns for counterbattery fire. Some battalions lacked the 10cm gun battery and had a third 15cm howitzer battery as a substitute. Batteries had four pieces.



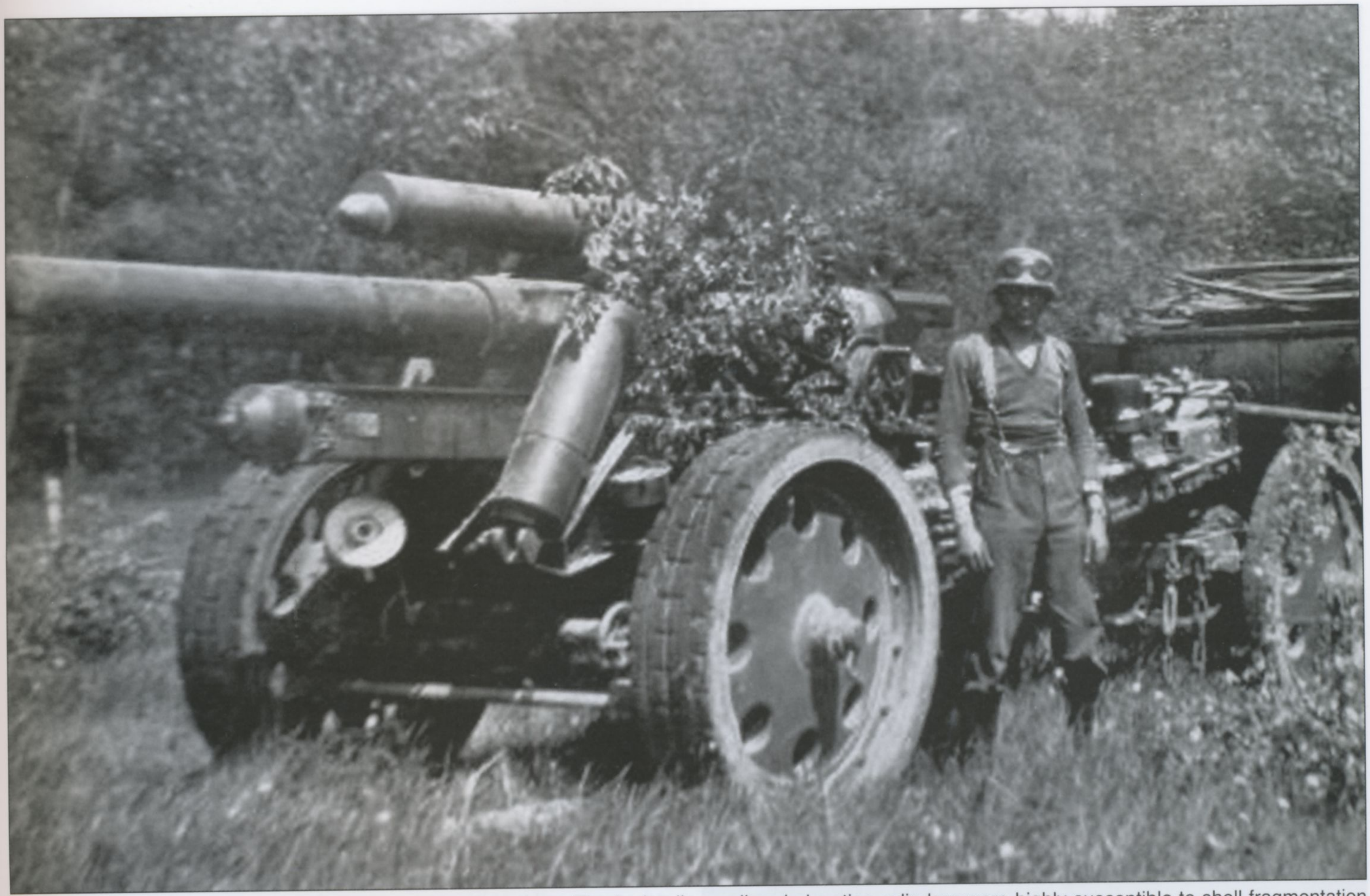
This 15cm sFH18 howitzer is positioned behind a farm house. Besides making it more difficult to detect by ground observation, an artillery piece position among a group of buildings was hard to detect from a fast moving aircraft. It is additionally camouflaged by tree limbs leaning against the wheels. The large exposed wheels were the most noticeable feature of an artillery piece from an aircraft. Note the howitzer's limber wheels positioned to the rear.



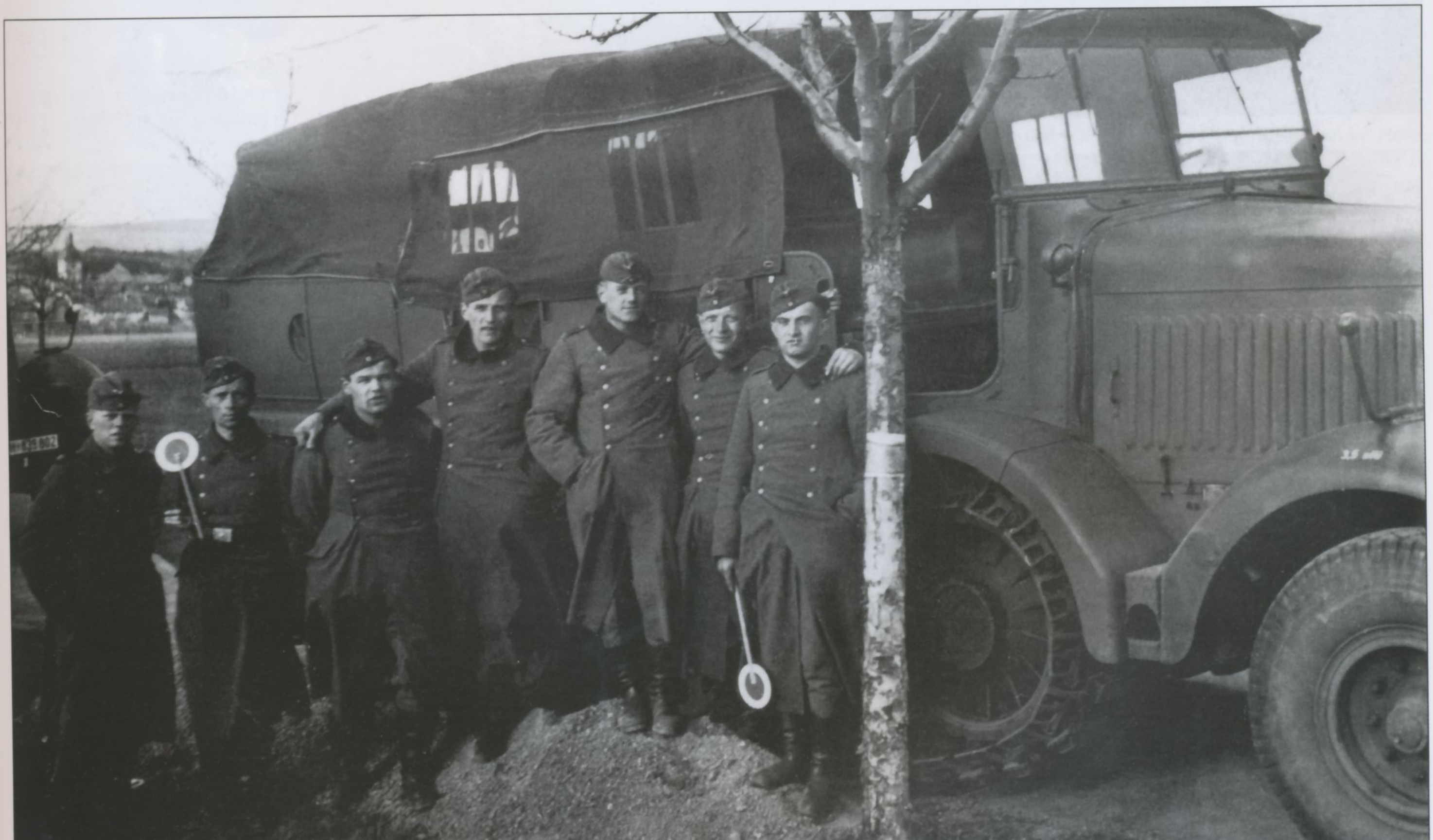
A 15cm sFH18 howitzer is unlimbered and prepared for firing. In the background can faintly be seen a 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack prime mover for one of the battery's other howitzers.



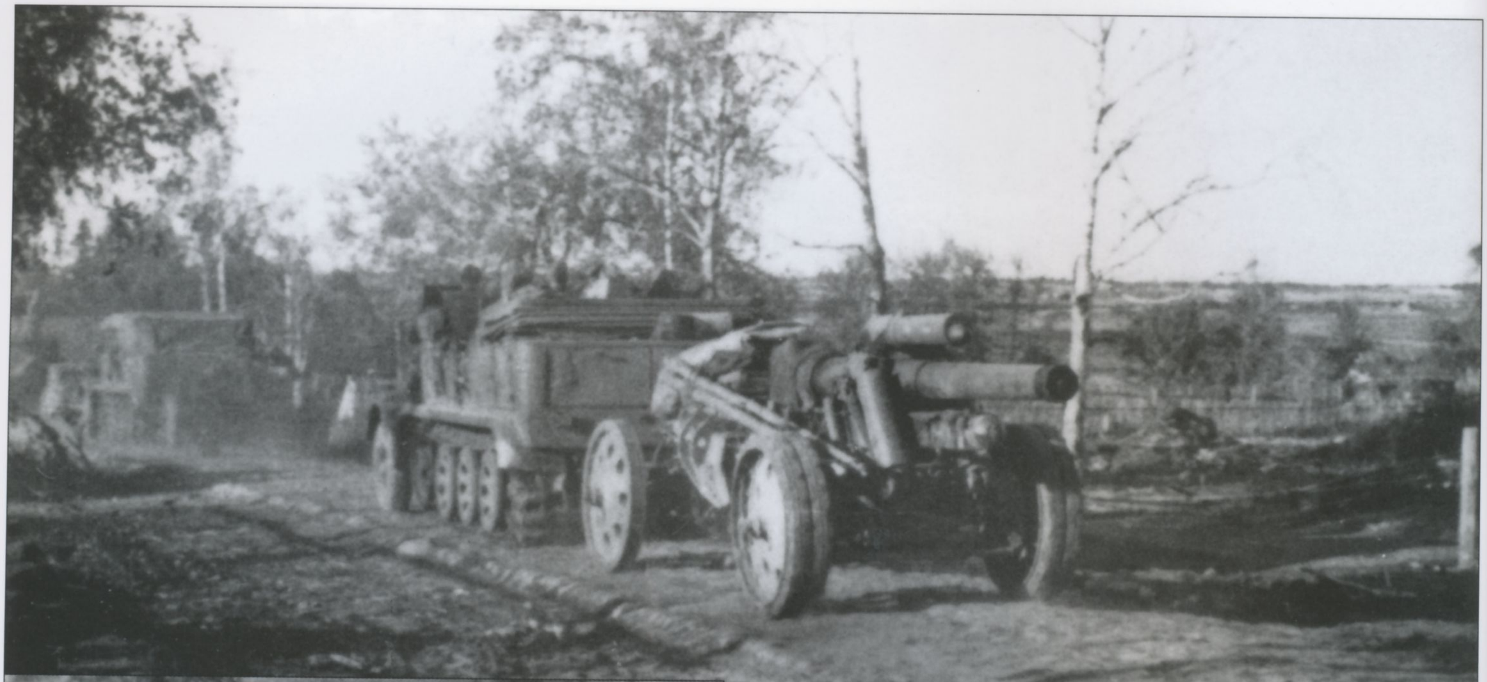
Two 15cm field howitzer crewmen carry off spent cartridge cases, which would be retuned to the factory for refurbishing and reloading. The man to the left wears the rubberized protective coat for motorcyclists. They were also sometimes issued to vehicle drivers, which probably identifies this man as a gun crew's halftrack prime-mover driver.



The crewman of a 15cm howitzer poses beside the big weapon. The hydraulic recoil and elevation cylinders were highly susceptible to shell fragmentation penetration, which would disable the piece.

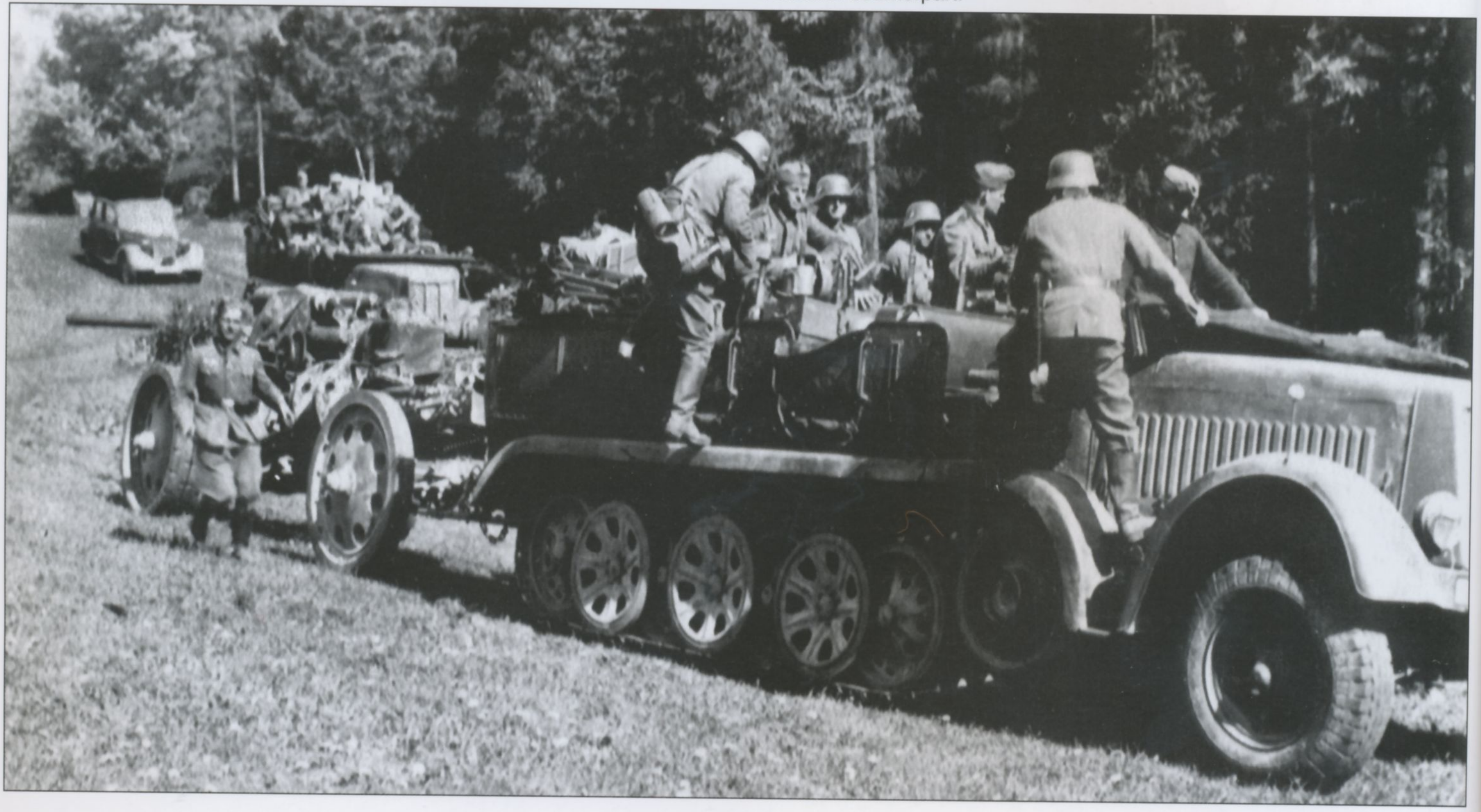


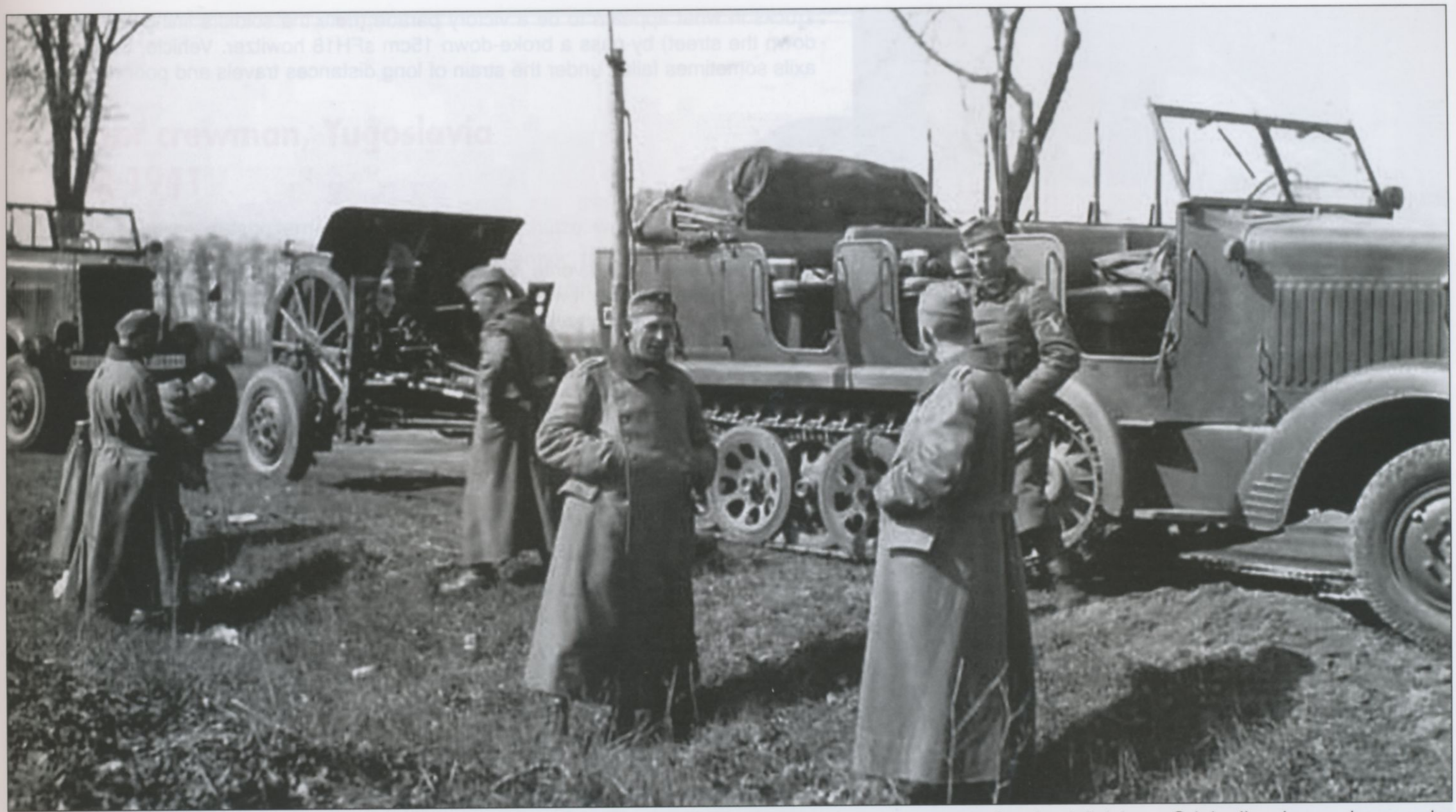
Artillerymen pose beside their 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack. This vehicle was used as a prime mover for 10cm guns, 15cm field howitzers, 15cm guns, 21cm mortars, and 8.8cm and 10.5cm Flak guns as well as for pioneer bridging equipment trailers. The red and white signal paddles were carried to send commands and directions between vehicles.



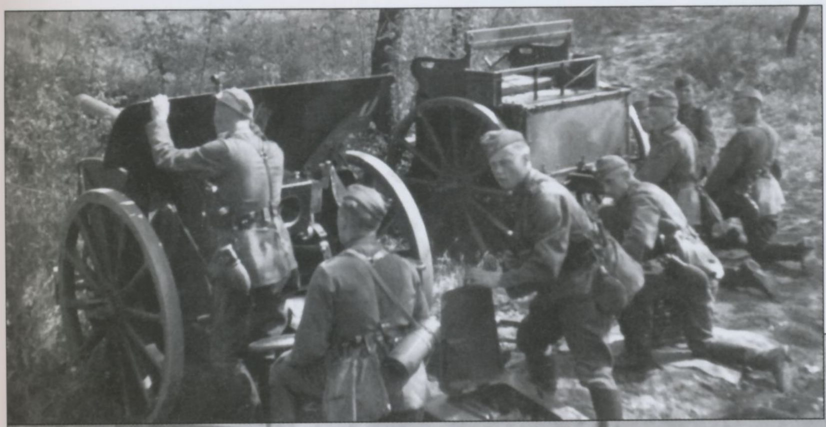
12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftracks tow 15cm sFH18 howitzers forward. Being motorized, these may be from a corps heavy artillery battalion. These pieces had a 13-man crew. The German halftrack design limited its utility by having fixed crosswise passenger seats rather than an open cargo compartment with rear-loading capability and folding bench seats along the sides. This way it could have also been used as a cargo carrier and not just as a passenger and towing vehicle.

A 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack tows a 15cm K18 heavy gun. This was an army artillery weapon and used the same chassis as its 15cm sFH18 howitzer counterpart.



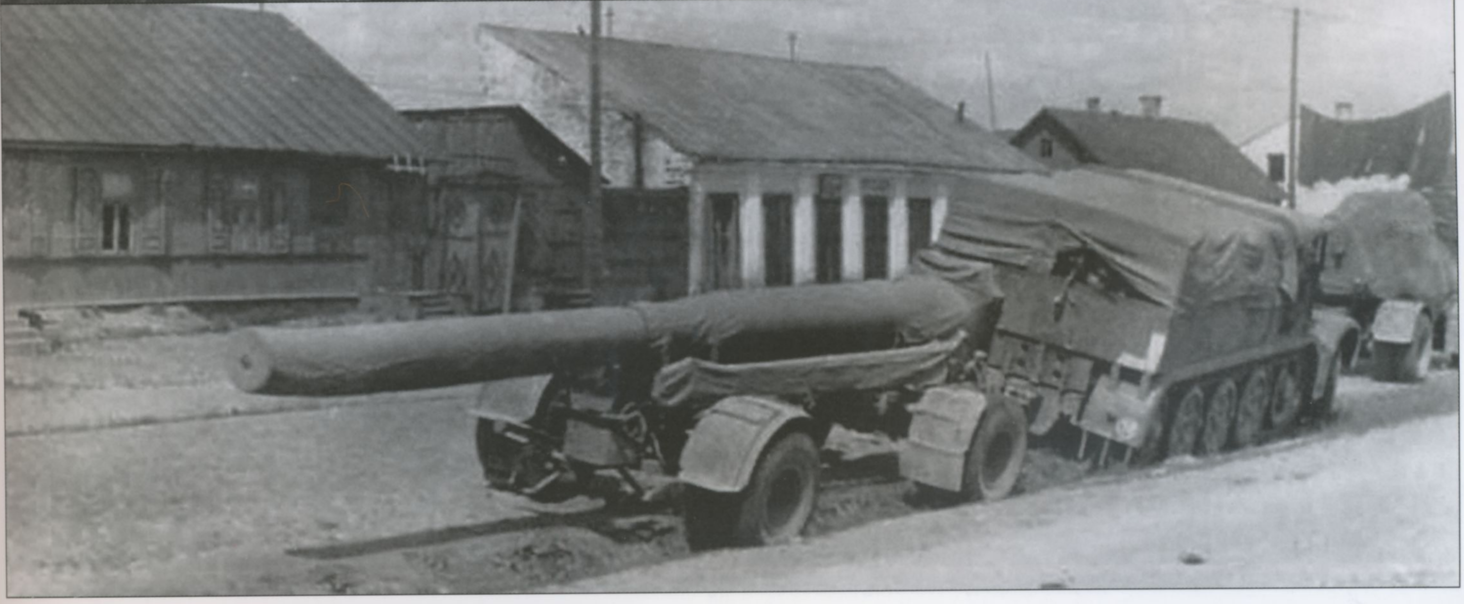


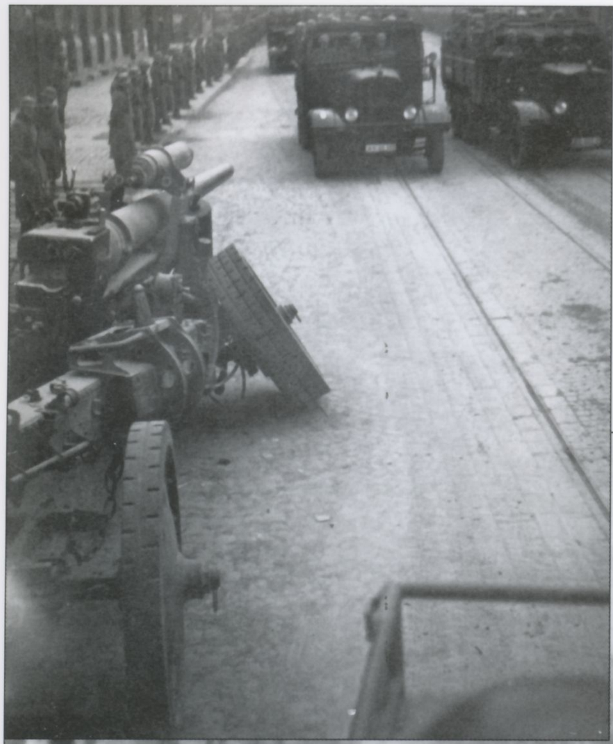
The obsolescent 10.5cm lFH16 field howitzer was a post-World War I piece, but was used to arm some newly raised divisions. Originally a horse-drawn order to allow the un-sprung howitzer carriage to be towed at motor vehicle speeds the two-wheel Sd Ah3 light weapons trailer was provided. It had its own towing arm, but when a howitzer was mounted and locked on its own longer towing trails were fastened to the prime mover—here a 5-ton SdKfz 6 medium halftrack. The gun could not be fired from this trailer. Note the upward folded steel ramps that allow the gun to be off-loaded. The same trailer was used to haul the obsolete 7.5cm lFK 16 light field cannon.



The crew of a 10.5cm lFH16 field howitzer prepare for direct fire on a target. This weapon had about 2,500 meters shorter range than the standard 10.5cm lFH18 field howitzer. The identify features of the lFH16 were the fixed box trail (no split trail like the lFH18) and a distinctively curved shield, which was larger than the lFH18's.

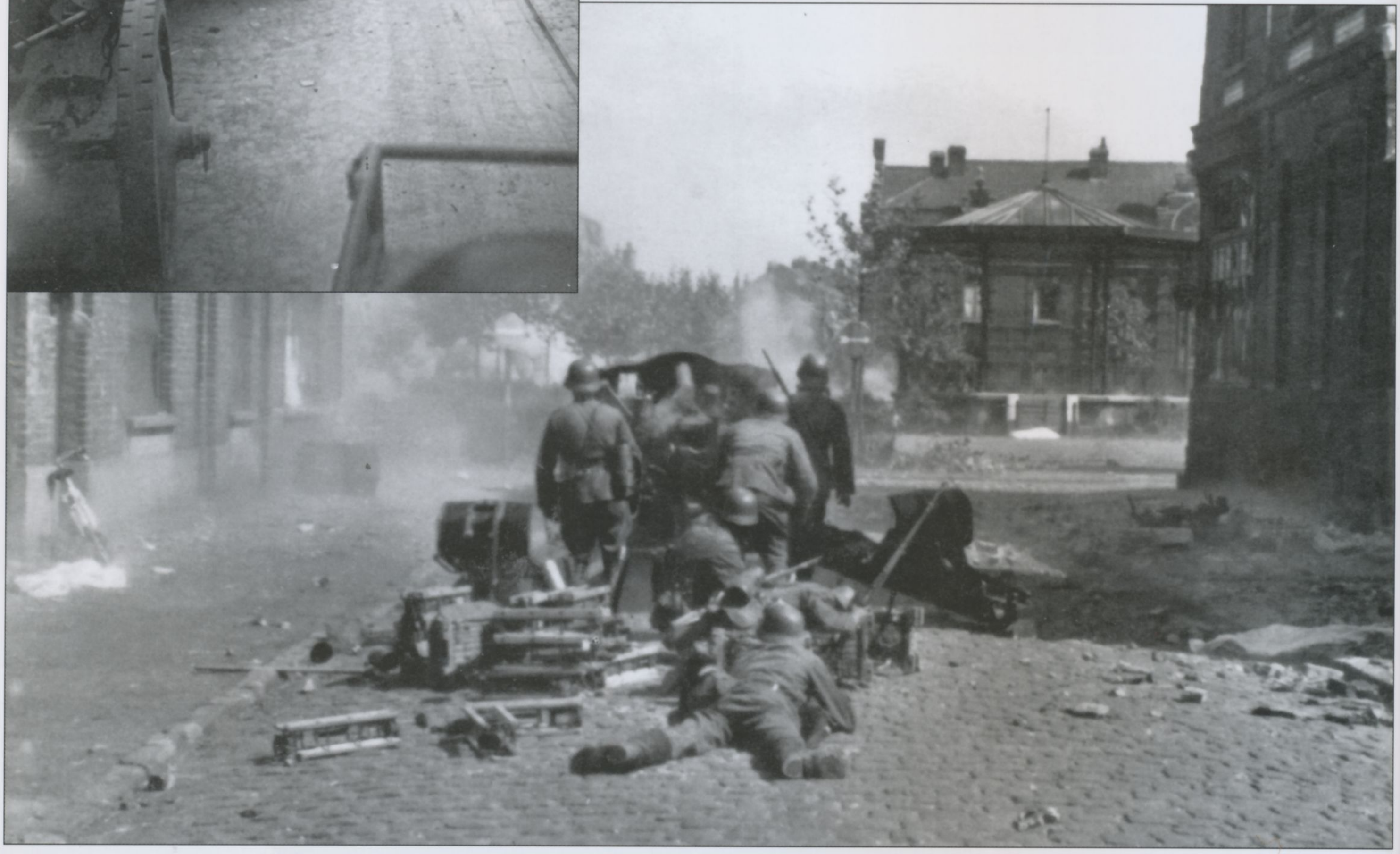
Army-level heavy artillery included the 21cm K39 cannon. Here the barrel is on its transporter under tow by a 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack. In front of the halftrack can be seen its canvas-covered carriage, also towed by a halftrack. Such large guns were assigned with two per battery.

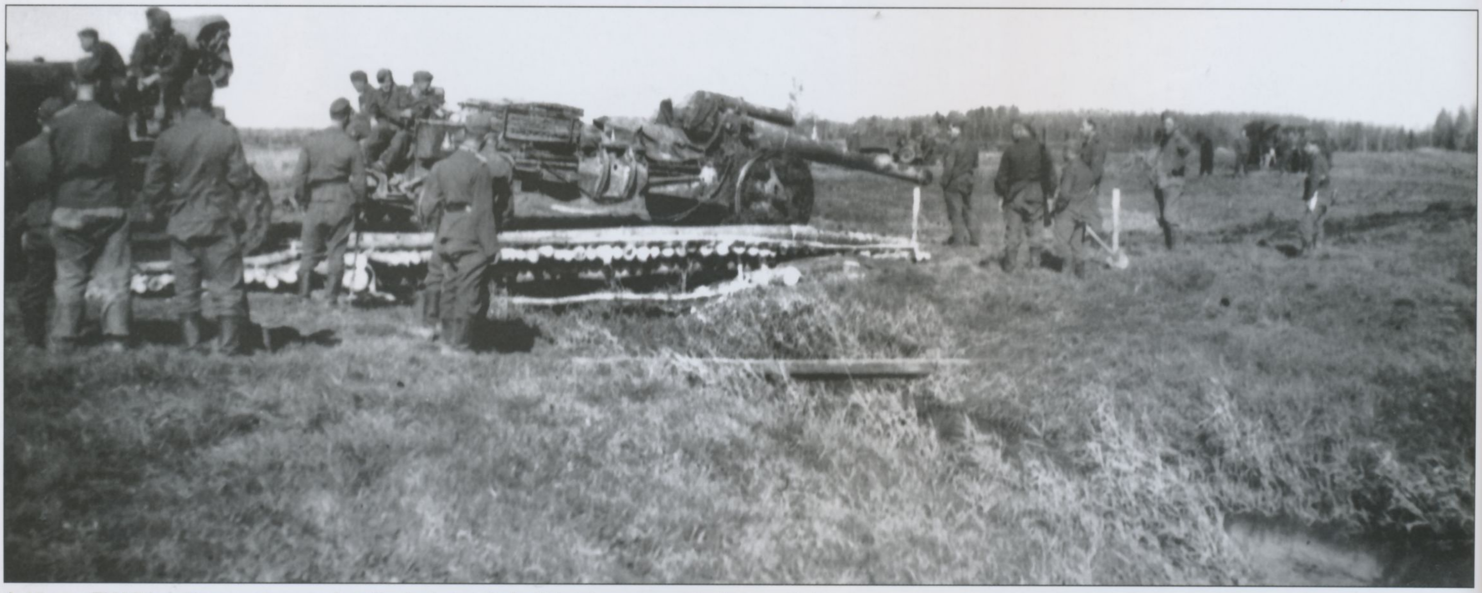




Trucks in what appears to be a victory parade (note the soldiers lining the curb further down the street) by-pass a broke-down 15cm sFH18 howitzer. Vehicle, trailer, and gun axils sometimes failed under the strain of long distances travels and poor roads.

Not an artillereyman's favorite job, direct fire over open sights straight into the teeth of the enemy. Nonetheless it was not uncommon for divisional artillery crew to be called for such duties, especially in recently raised divisions which usually lacked infantry guns in their infantry regiments. It was a certain means of dislodging dedicated defenders from fortified buildings. The scattered small frame-like containers to the left of the prone cannonier were for 10.5cm projectiles.

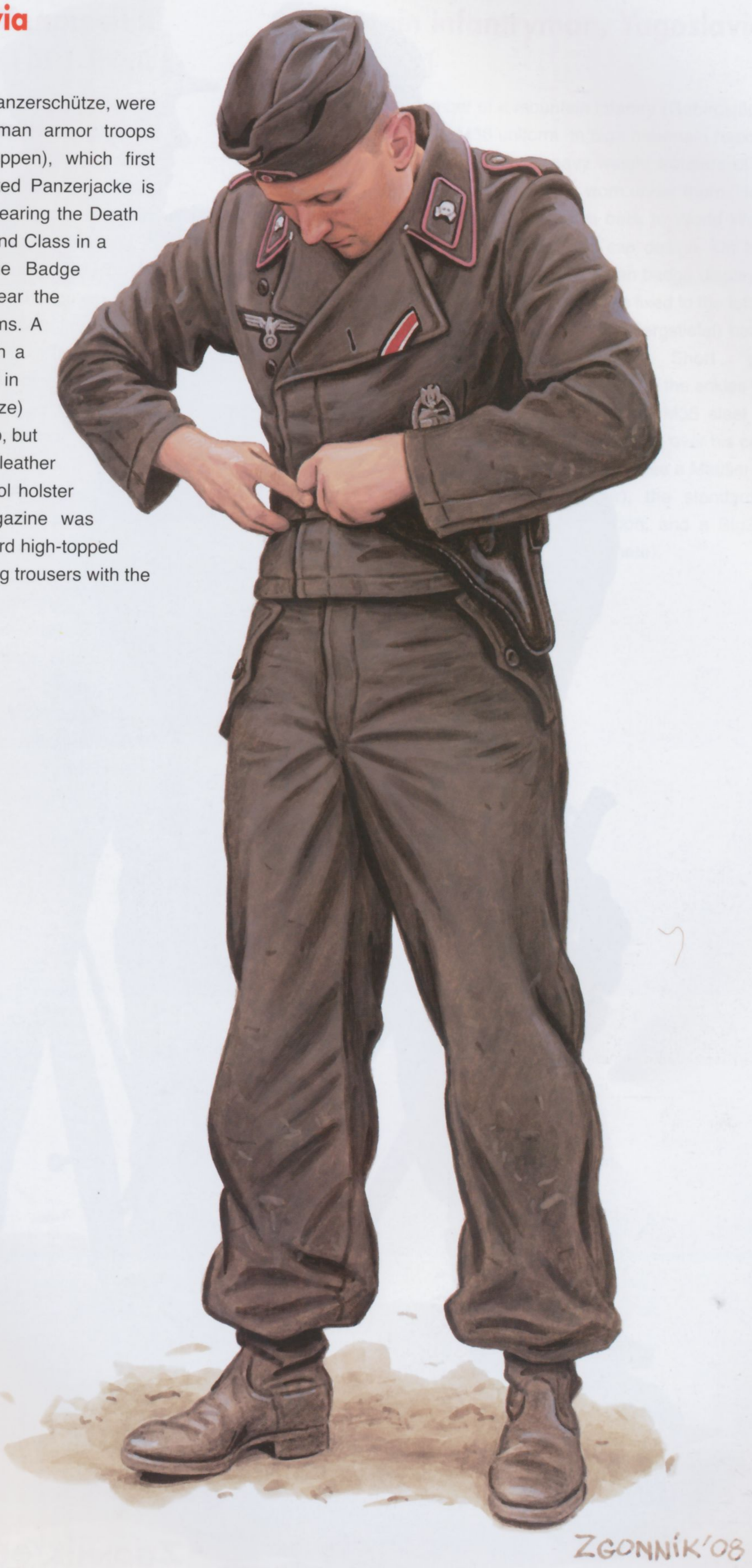


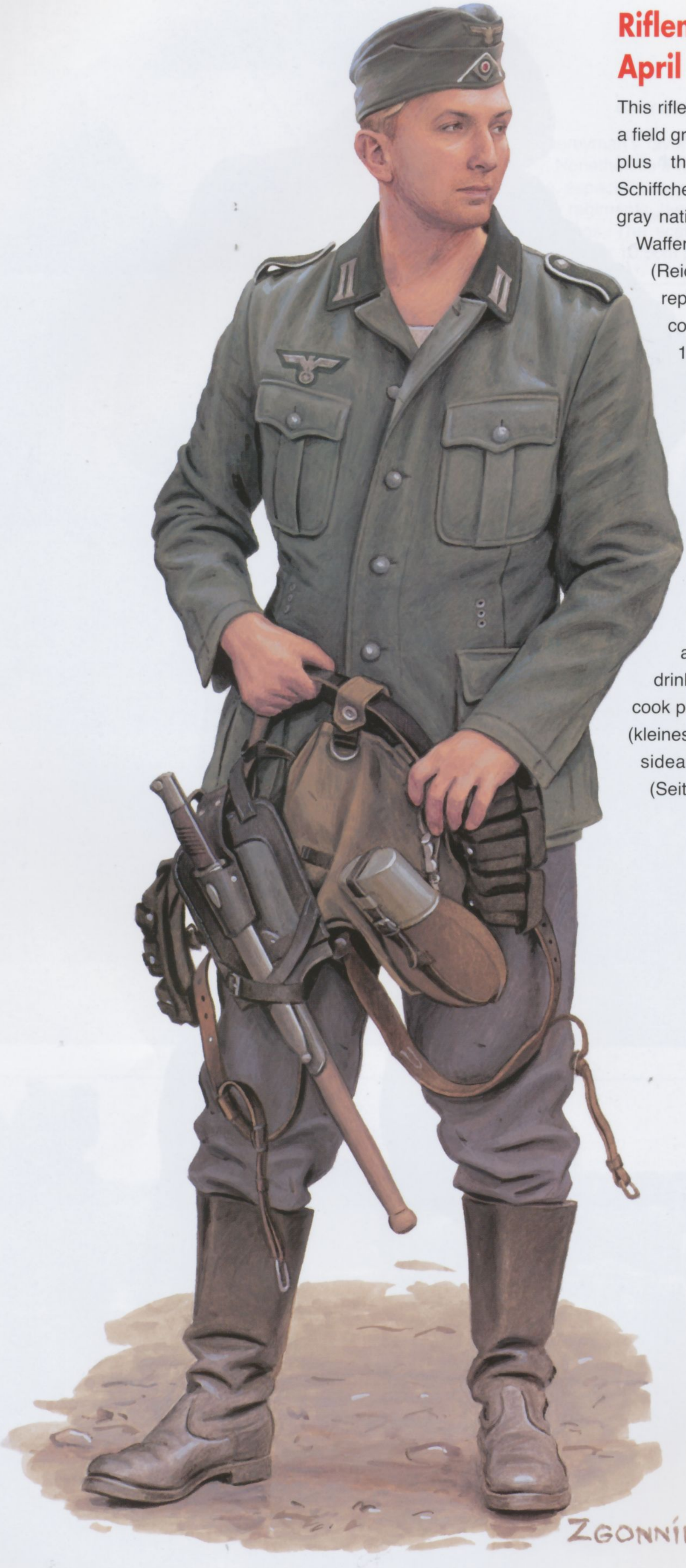


A 15cm sFH18 howitzer crosses a hastily, but stoutly built bridge over a drainage ditch.

Panzer crewman, Yugoslavia April 1941

Panzermänner—a slang term—his rank is Panzerschütze, were issued the black special uniform for German armor troops (Sonderbekleidung für deutsche Panzertruppen), which first appeared in early 1935. The double-breasted Panzerjacke is adorned with pink Waffenfarbe, collar tabs bearing the Death Head insignia, the ribbon of the Iron Cross 2nd Class in a label button hole, and the Armor Battle Badge (Panzerkampfabzeichen). NCOs did not wear the 9mm collar braid worn on field gray uniforms. A gray shirt was worn beneath the jacket with a black necktie, although this was often deleted in combat. The armor field cap (Panzerfeldmütze) was similar in design to the field gray M36 cap, but was adopted in early 1940. The issue brown leather belt was worn with a 9mm P38 Walther pistol holster (Pistolentasche). A spare eight-round magazine was carried in a pocket on the holster. The standard high-topped marching boots were used with the loose-fitting trousers with the ankles secured by small straps.



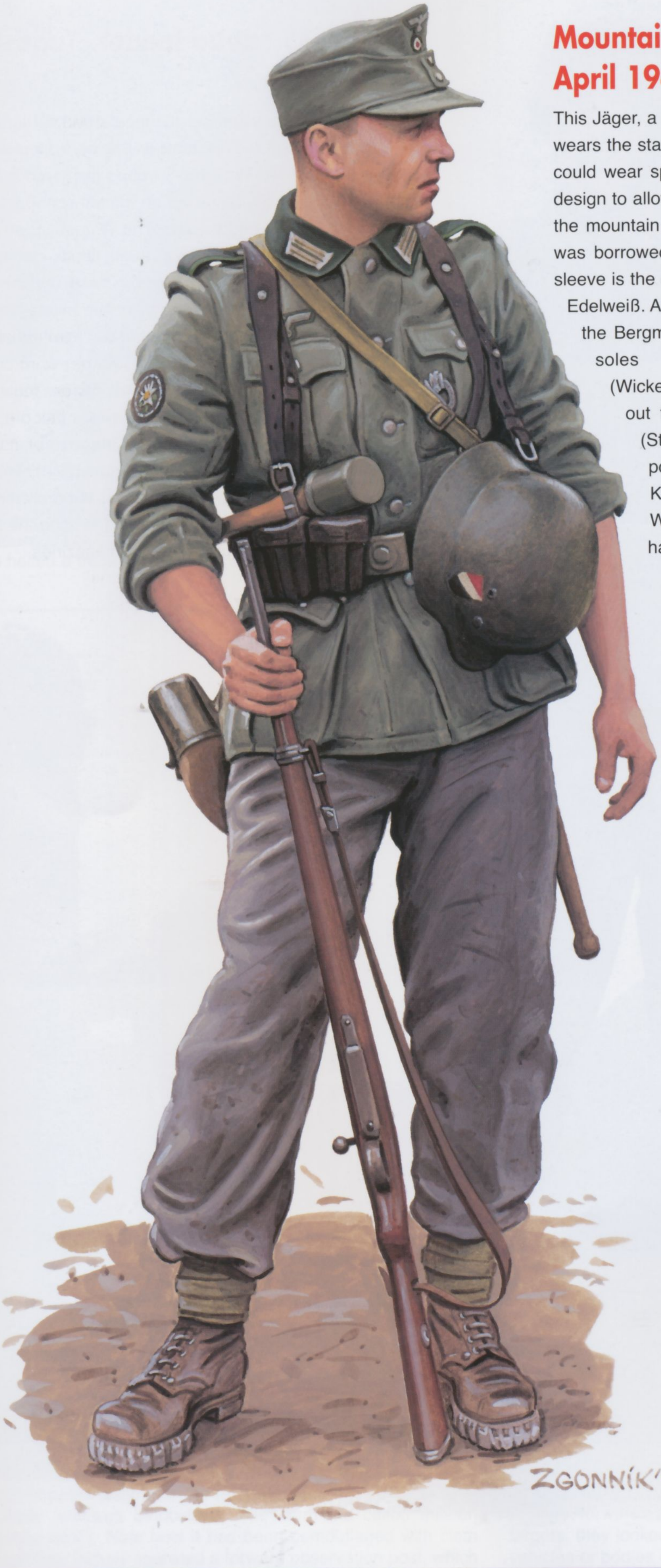


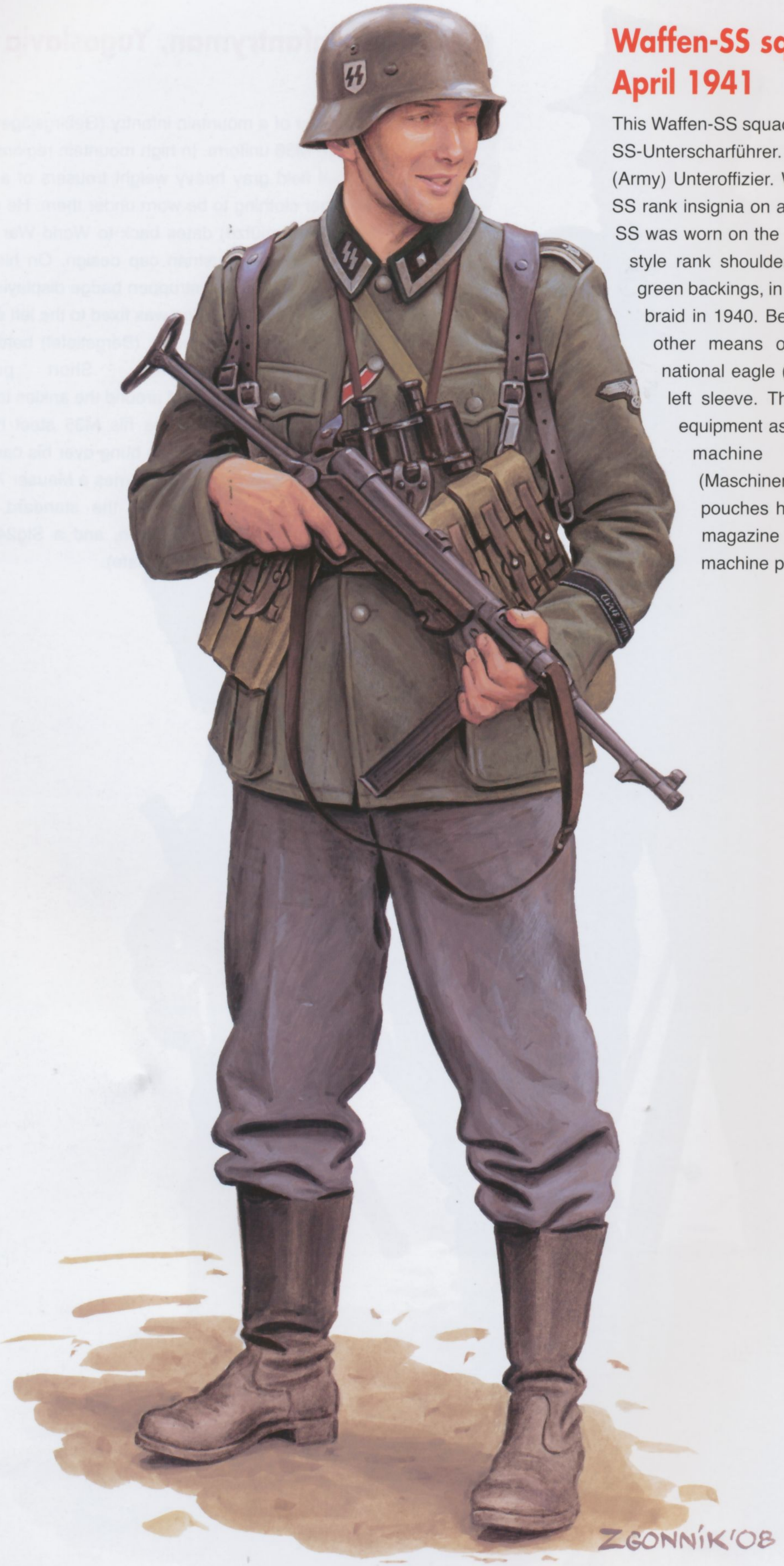
Rifleman, Yugoslavia April 1941

This rifleman (Schütze) is outfitted in the M36 field uniform with a field gray tunic (Feldbluse) and stone gray trousers (Feldhose) plus the M38 field cap (Feldmütze) known as the Schiffchenmütze (little boat cap). The cap was adorned by a dull gray national eagle (Hoheitsabzeichen), a chevron in the unit's Waffenfarbe, and red, white and black national cockade (Reichskokade). The stone gray trousers had begun to be replaced by field gray in early 1940, but the gray trousers continued to be worn until worn out. Few remained by late 1942. The high-topped leather marching boots (Marschstiefel) were still the standard footwear. It was not until 1942 that the short laced boots were introduced. This Landser holds a set of individual field equipment (Feldausrüstung des Mannes) consisting of the brown leather belt and buckle (Koppel und Koppelschloss), belt support straps (Koppeltragegestell), two three-pocket cartridge pouches (Patronentasche 11) holding a total of 60 rounds of 7.9mm cartridges in five-round charging clips, bread bag (Brotbeutel 31) containing rations and small personal items, canteen or field flask and drinking cup (Feldflasche 31 und Trinkbecher), mess kit or cook pot (Kochgeschirr 31), small entrenching tool und carrier (kleines Schanzzeug und Tasche), with a S84/98 bayonet or sidearm as it was more commonly referred to (Seitengewehr).

Mountain infantryman, Yugoslavia April 1941

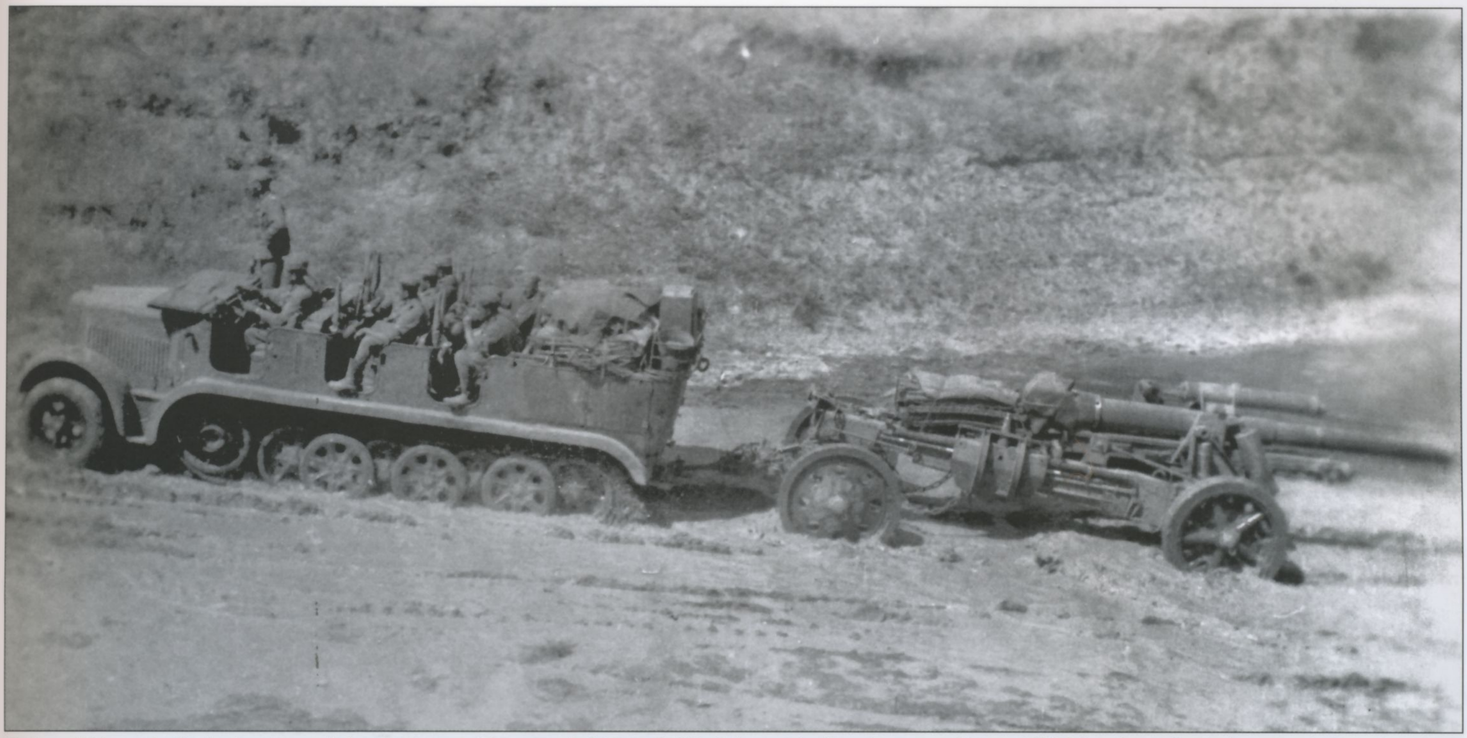
This Jäger, a member of a mountain infantry (Gebirgsjäger) unit wears the standard M36 uniform. In high mountain regions they could wear special field gray heavy weight trousers of a fuller design to allow other clothing to be worn under them. He wears the mountain cap (Bergmütze) dates back to World War I and was borrowed from a 1909 Austrian cap design. On his right sleeve is the embroidered Gebirgstruppen badge displaying the Edelweiß. A metal edelweiss badge was fixed to the left side of the Bergmütze. His mountain boots (Bergstiefel) bear thick soles and heavy hobnails. Short puttees (Wickelgamaschen) are bound around the ankles to keep out foreign matter. He carries his M35 steel helmet (Stahlhelm) with its chinstrap hung over his cartridge pouches. For armament he carries a Mauser 7.9mm Kar98k carbine (Karabiner), the standard issue Wehrmachts shoulder weapon, and a Stg24 stick hand grenade (Stielhandgranate).



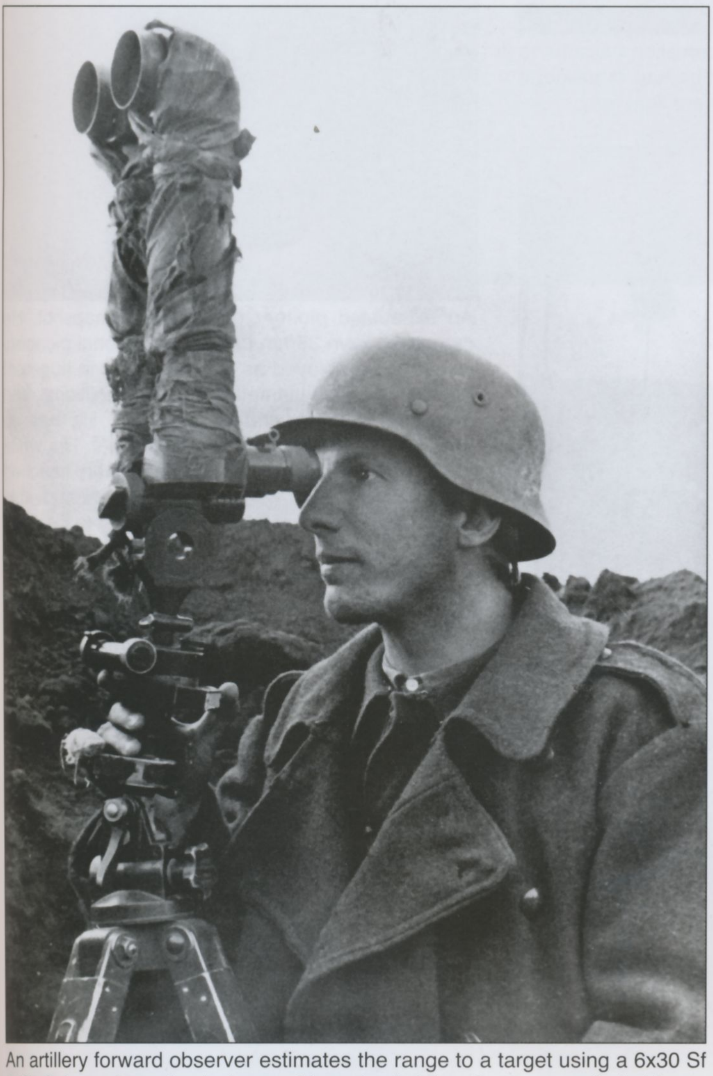


Waffen-SS squad leader, Yugoslavia April 1941

This Waffen-SS squad leader (Gruppeführer) carriers the rank of SS-Unterscharführer. This rank is the equivalent to the Heer (Army) Unteroffizier. Waffen-SS troops displayed the traditional SS rank insignia on a black tab on the left collar while the runic SS was worn on the right collar. The Waffen-SS adopted Heer-style rank shoulder straps, but with black rather than dark green backings, in 1935 (officers' in 1938) and the NCO collar braid in 1940. Besides the distinctive helmet transfers, the other means of identification as Waffen-SS was the national eagle (SS-Hoheitsabzeichen) worn on the upper left sleeve. This squad leader carries the same basic equipment as a rifleman, but has a pair of three-pocket machine pistol magazine pouches (Maschinenpistolen-Magazintaschen). The left set of pouches had a small pocket fitted on the side for a magazine loader to assist in loading the 9mm MP40 machine pistol's 32-round magazines.

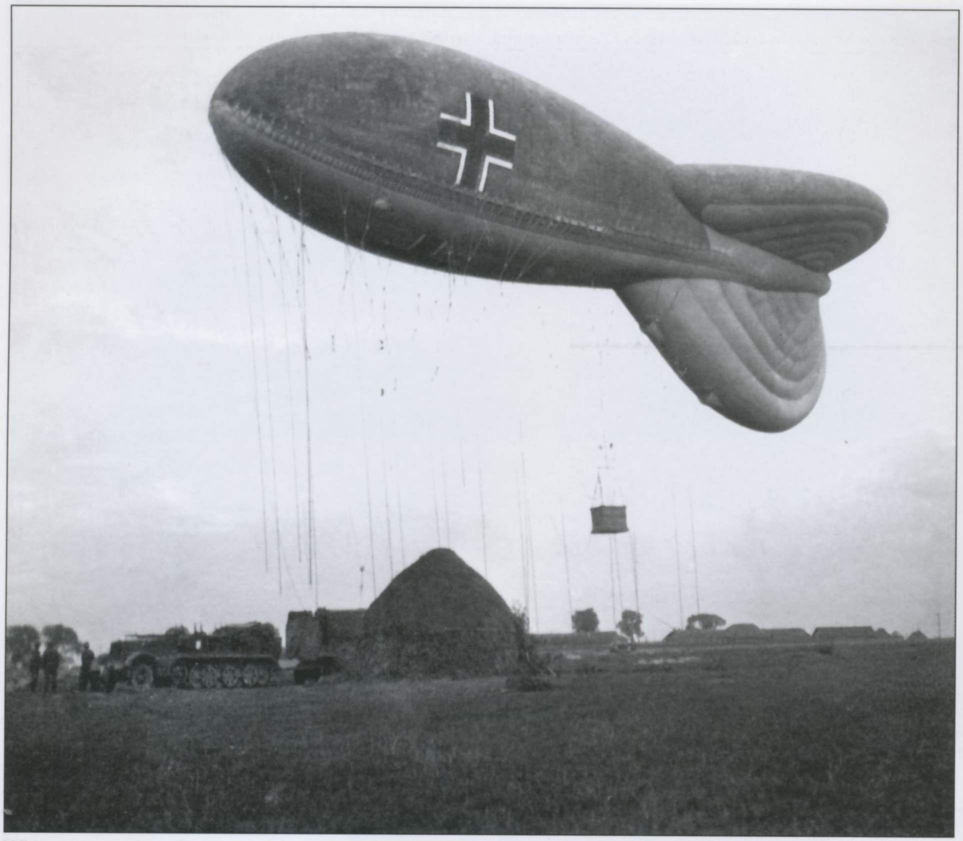


Mud would have halted a truck much less a team of horses. A 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack tows a 15cm sFH18 howitzer through a soup of mud.

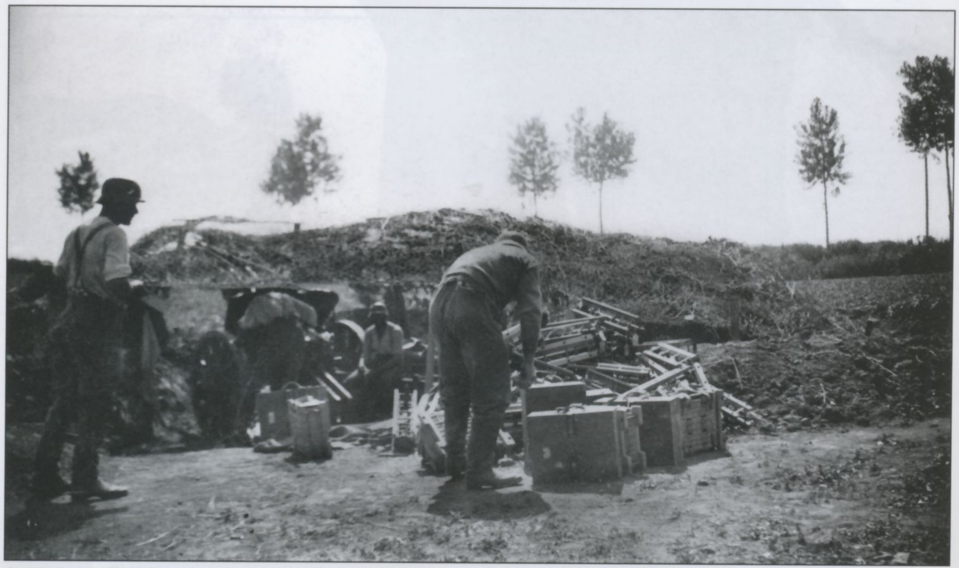


An artillery forward observer estimates the range to a target using a 6x30 Sf 14Z Scherenfernrohr (scissors binoculars). The Germans called this an Eselsohren ("donkey ears"). Note how it has been camouflaged with cloth wrappings. Each artillery battery operated a forward observation post, which was the battery commander's position.

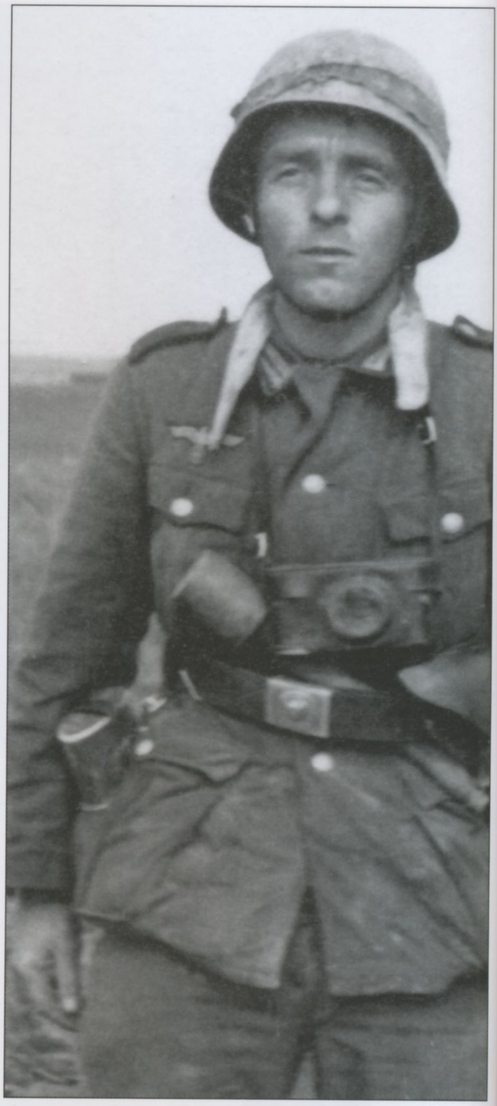
Artillery forward observers search for targets. Besides detecting actual targets, they looked for weapon muzzle flashes/smoke/dust, dust raised by vehicles or bodies of troops, smoke from cooking and warming fires, vehicle tracks on open ground, and wilted cut vegetation used as camouflage.



With enemy aircraft cleaned from the sky the Germans made some use of observation balloons to detect targets and adjust artillery fire. The observer wore a parachute in event he had to bailout if enemy aircraft appeared. It took too long to reel down a balloon. The balloons were light gray.

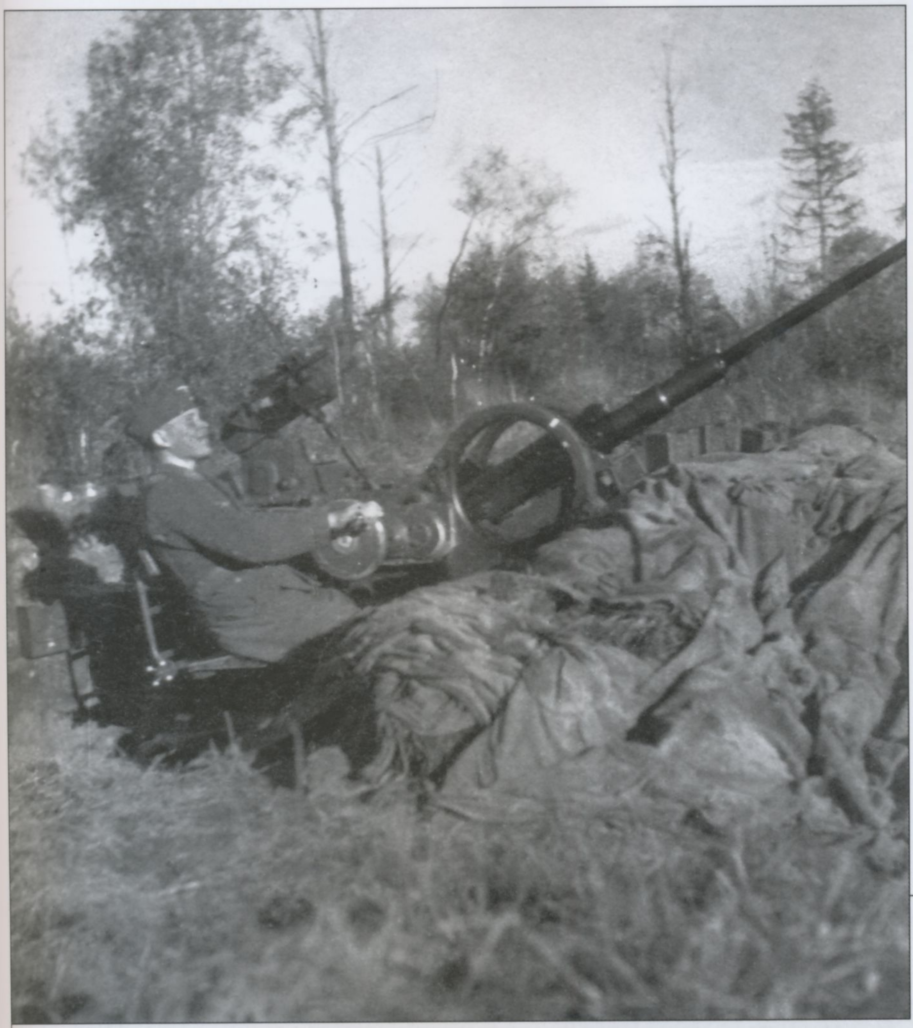


A 10.5cm lFH18 crew pumps out rounds from a partly dug-in position. The camouflage net serves three purposes: 1) to conceal the position from detection, 2) prevent the type of gun from being identified if the position is detected once the gun commences fire, and 3) provide shade for the crew. The containers to the right of the rightmost cannonier each contain three wicker containers, which each hold three cartridge cases. The Germans used semi-fixed ammunition, that is, the cartridge case and projectile were packaged separately. The propellant charge consisted of several circular small bags packed in the cartridge case. Bags were removed for the required range, the projectile was inserted into the mouth of the cartridge case, and the complete round loaded into the gun's breech.



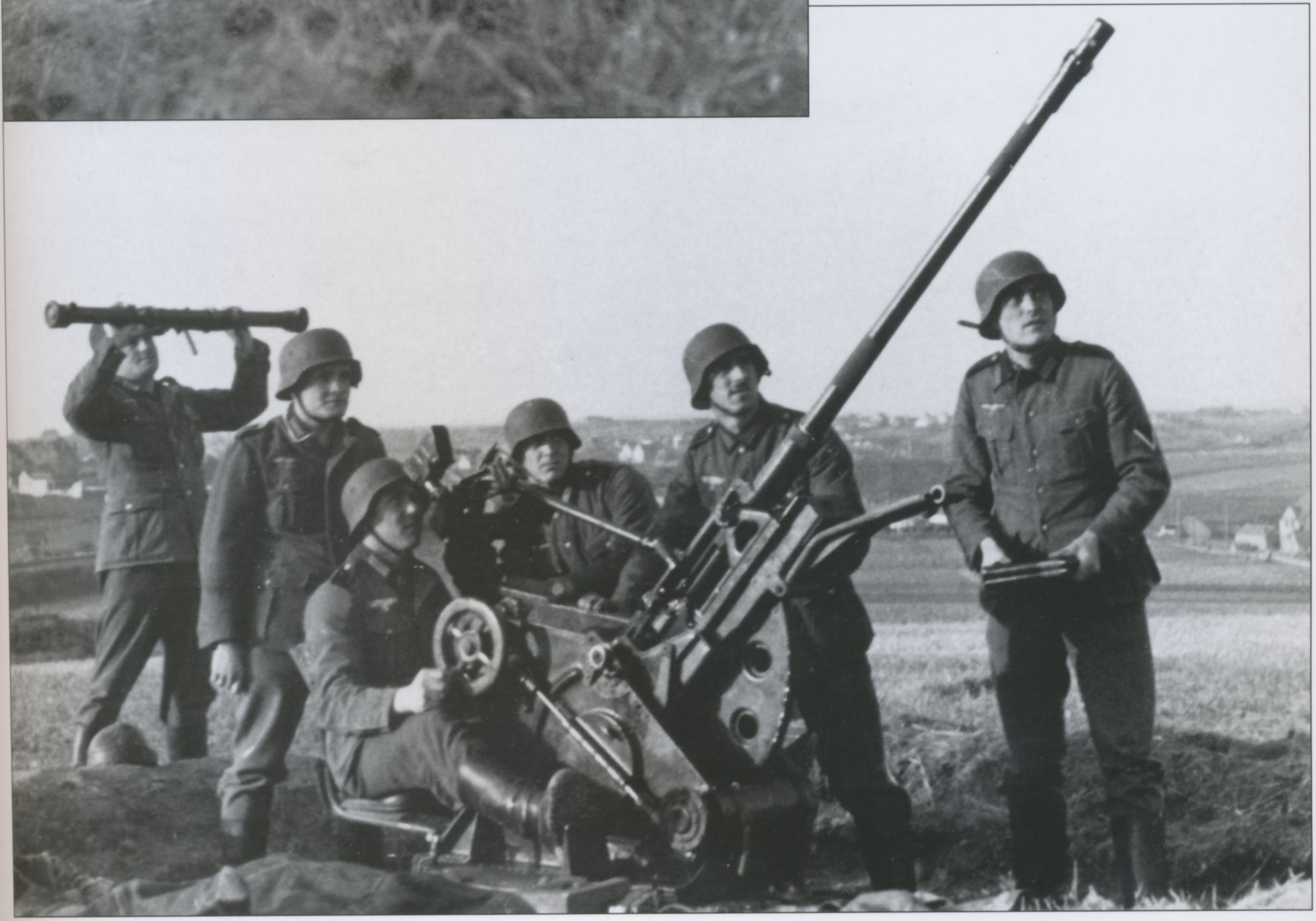
An exhausted pioneer poses for a snapshot. He carries his own 35mm camera. Divisional pioneers were often employed as assault troops to augment infantrymen with flamethrowers, demolitions, and screening smoke candles and pots. He has an elastic camouflage band on his helmet. His white collar liner can be seen plainly. There were attached to the tunic collar by buttons and were removable for washing. They were often discarded in the field.

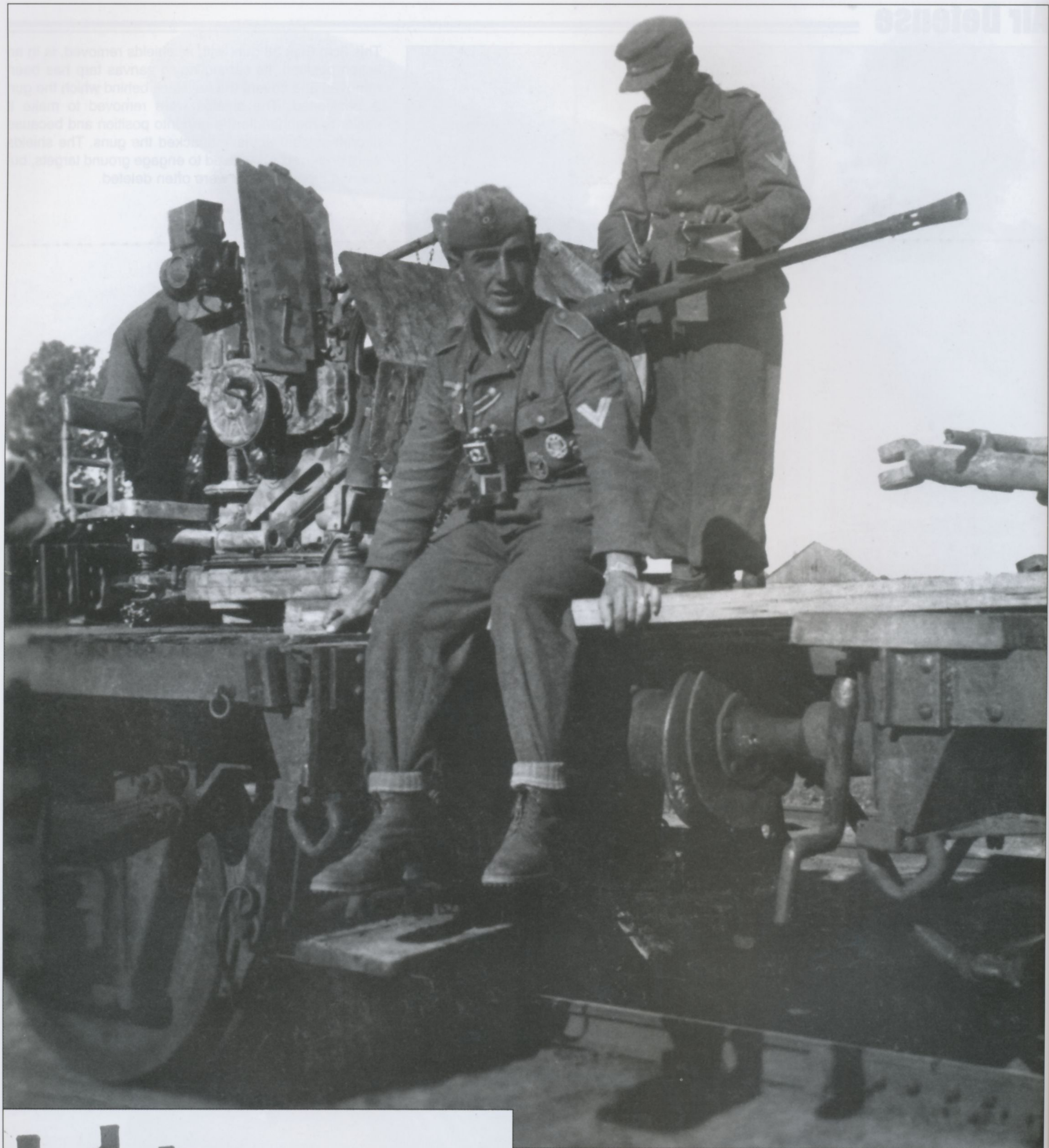
Artillerymen receive decorations for their actions during the invasion of Yugoslavia. Such award ceremonies were conducted in regimental or at least battalion formations. The artillery wore red Waffenfarbe on their shoulder straps.



This 2cm Flak 38 gun, with its shields removed, is in an action position. Its camouflaging canvas tarp has been removed and covers the haystack behind which the gun is positioned. The shields were removed to make it easier to manhandle the gun into position and because aircraft seldom actually attacked the guns. The shields were preferred when used to engage ground targets, but even in this case they were often deleted.

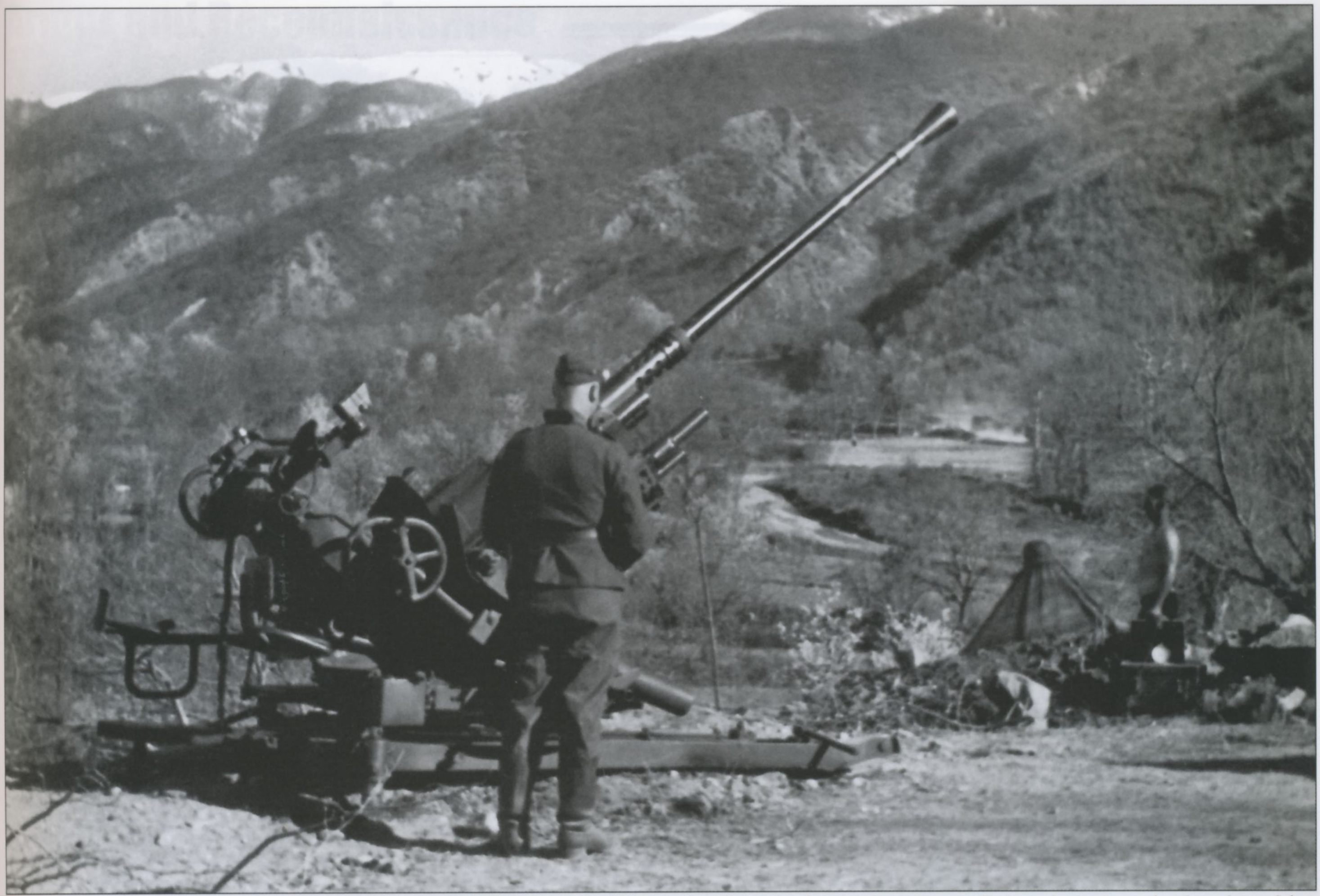
An Army manned 2cm Flak 30 gun tracks an aircraft trying to identify it as friend or foe. This gun was being augmented by the similar Flak 38, which is readily identified by its cone-shaped flash hider. The gun's usual shield has been removed. The loader to the right holds a 20-round magazine at the ready. To the left a man checks the range to the aircraft with an EmR36 1-meter stereoscopic rangefinder. On the ground can be seen Zeltbahn shelter-quarters used to camouflage the gun when not in action.



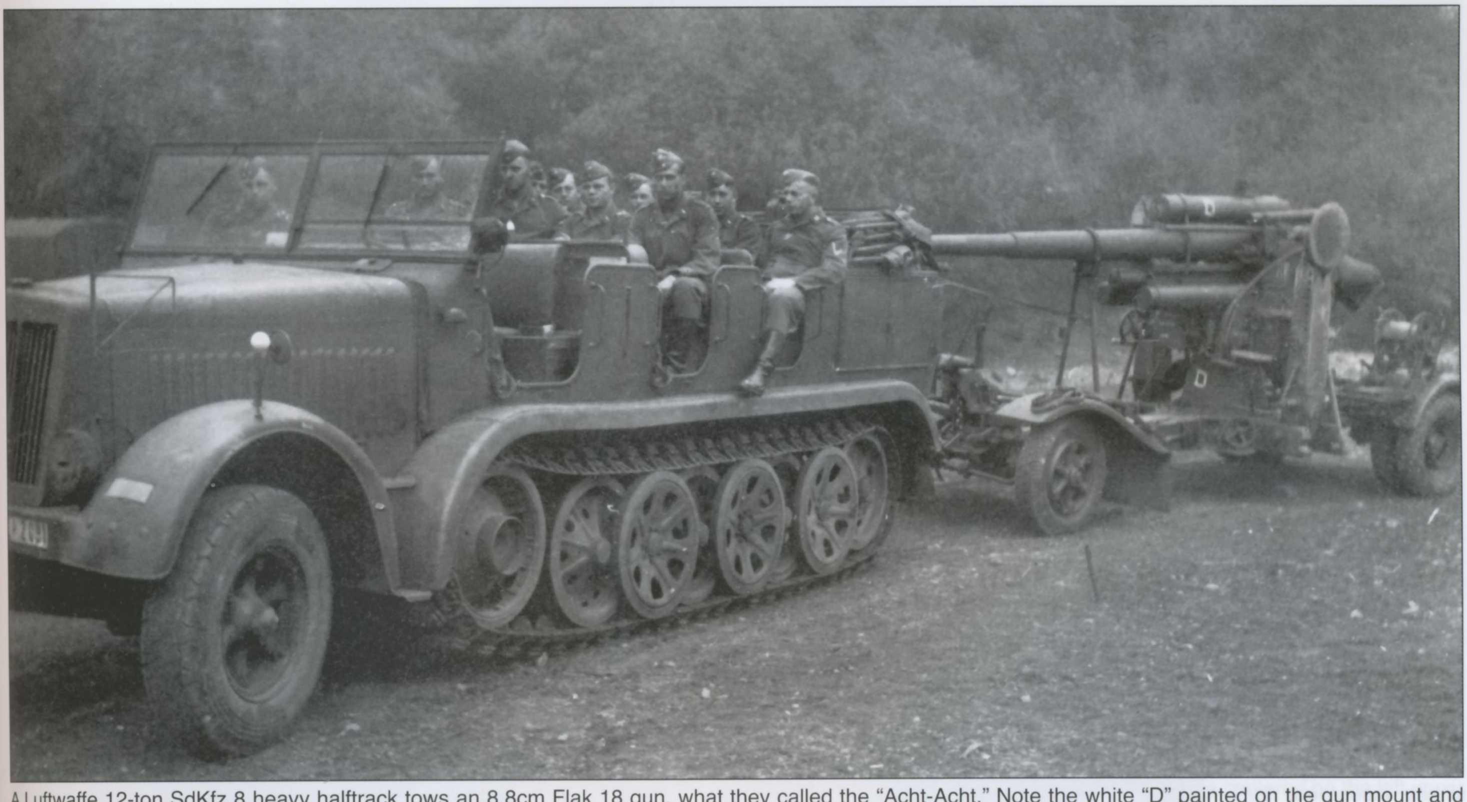


A 2cm Flak 38 has been mounted on a flatcar for air defense complete with its shields. The small camouflage pattern is essentially worthless as from and even short distance it will appear as a single color.

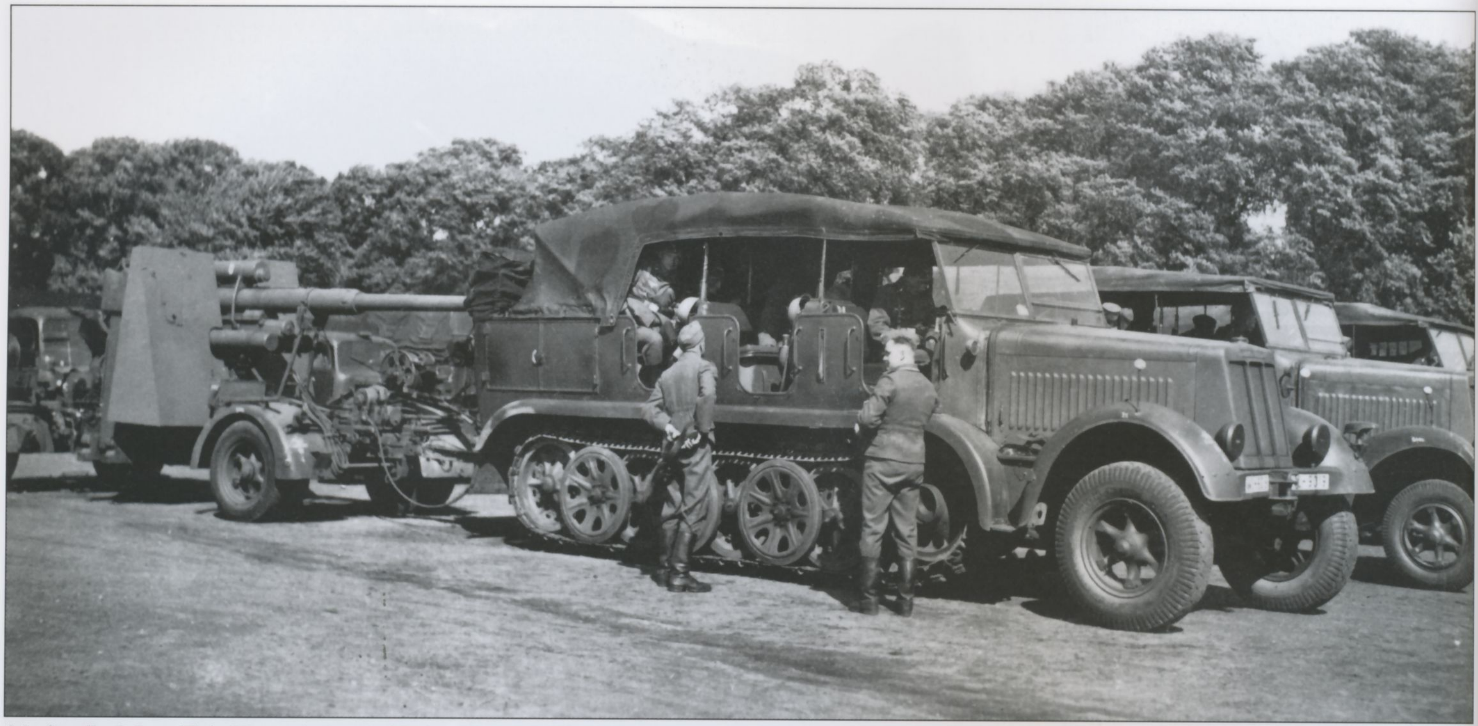
An SdKfz 10/5 halftrack mounting a 2cm Flak 30 is followed by a Krupp light cross-country truck. The same halftrack could also mount a 2cm Flak 38. The Krupp trucks hauled additional ammunition and gun and crew equipment.



A 3.7cm Flak 36 antiaircraft gun set-up in an unprotected position on the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian border. It was normally towed on a two-wheel carriage. A few of these guns were assigned to light Flak battalions while the bulk of the battalion's guns were 2cm weapons. The 3.7cm offered about a third more range than the 2cm, but with a much slower rate of fire; 80 rounds per minute as opposed the 2cm's 700-800 rounds per minute. Note the steel helmet atop the Zeltbahn tent for waterproofing.



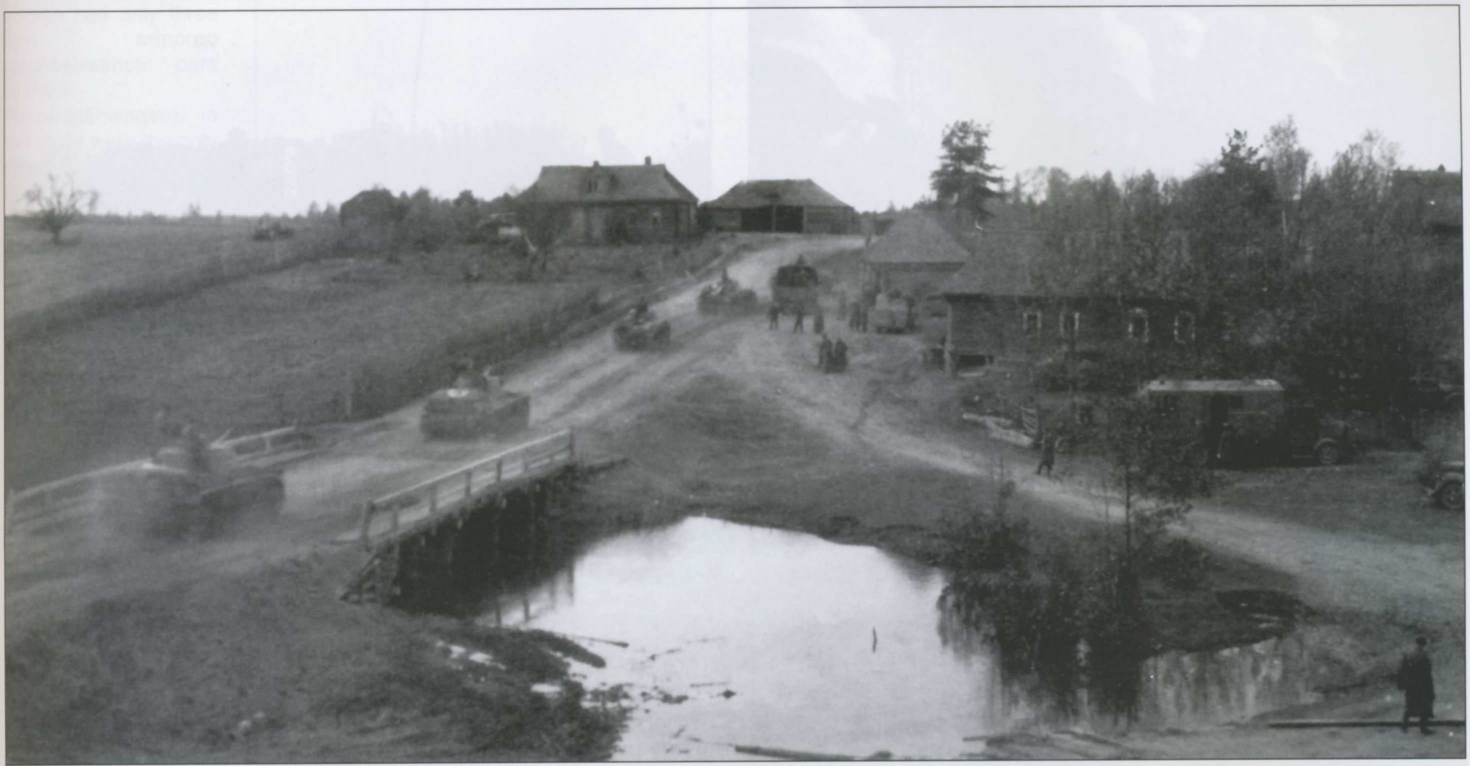
A Luftwaffe 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack tows an 8.8cm Flak 18 gun, what they called the "Acht-Acht." Note the white "D" painted on the gun mount and recoil cylinder. A battery's four guns were designated A to D and this was often marked somewhere on the weapon. Army artillery batteries followed the same practice. Verbally they were referred to by their phonetic alphabet letters: Anton, Bertha, Cäsar, and Dora.



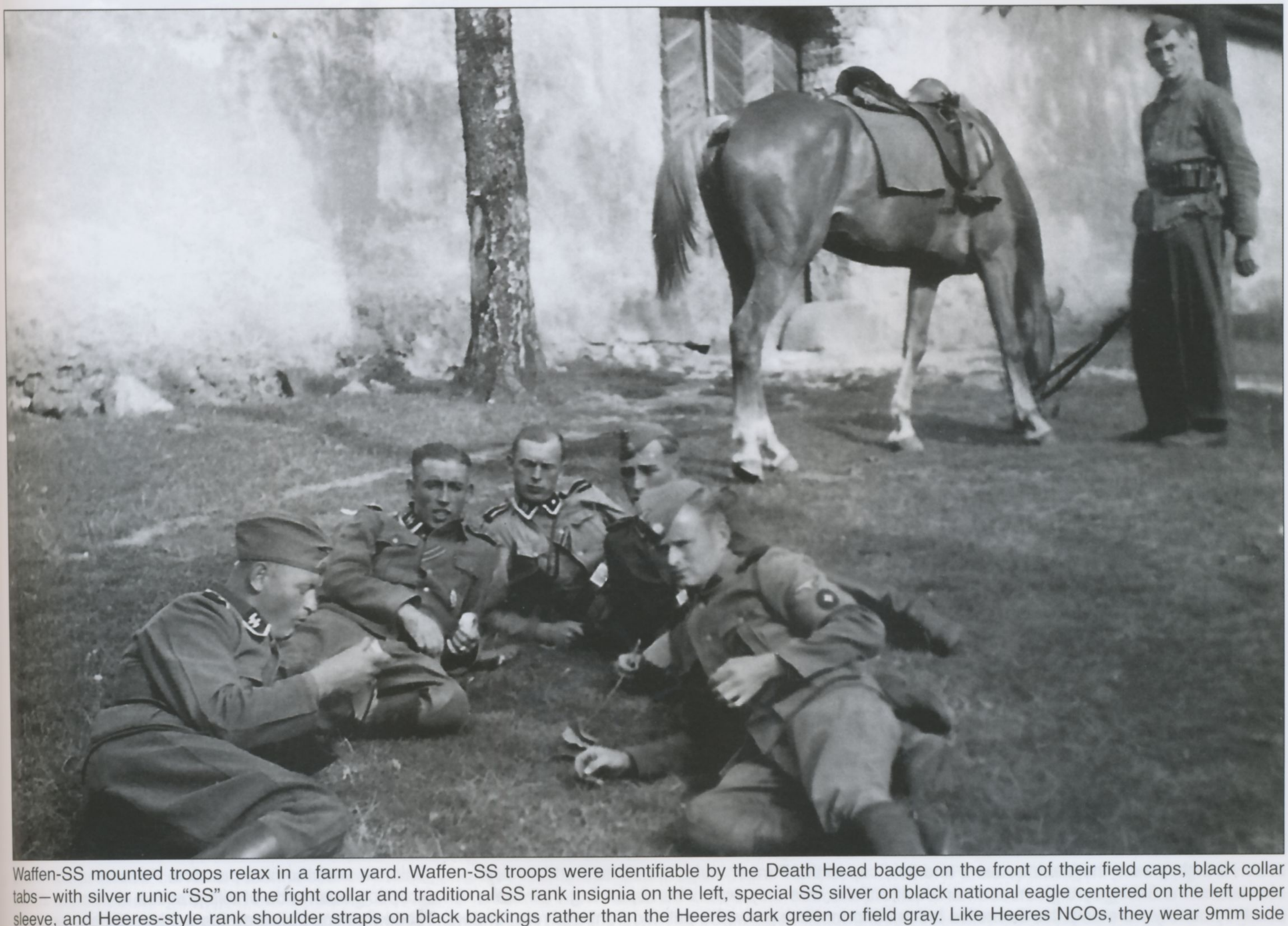
A Luftwaffe 8.8cm Flak 36 gun in tow behind a 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack. Note the halftrack's brown and green camouflage canvas cover. Luftwaffe Flak troops wore blue gray uniforms with red collar tabs and red piping on their shoulder straps.

8.8cm Flak units cross a river ford. The halftrack-towed 8.8cm gun is so heavily camouflaged with vegetation that it is almost unidentifiable as such. Both the Luftwaffe and the Army possessed 8.8cm Flak units.

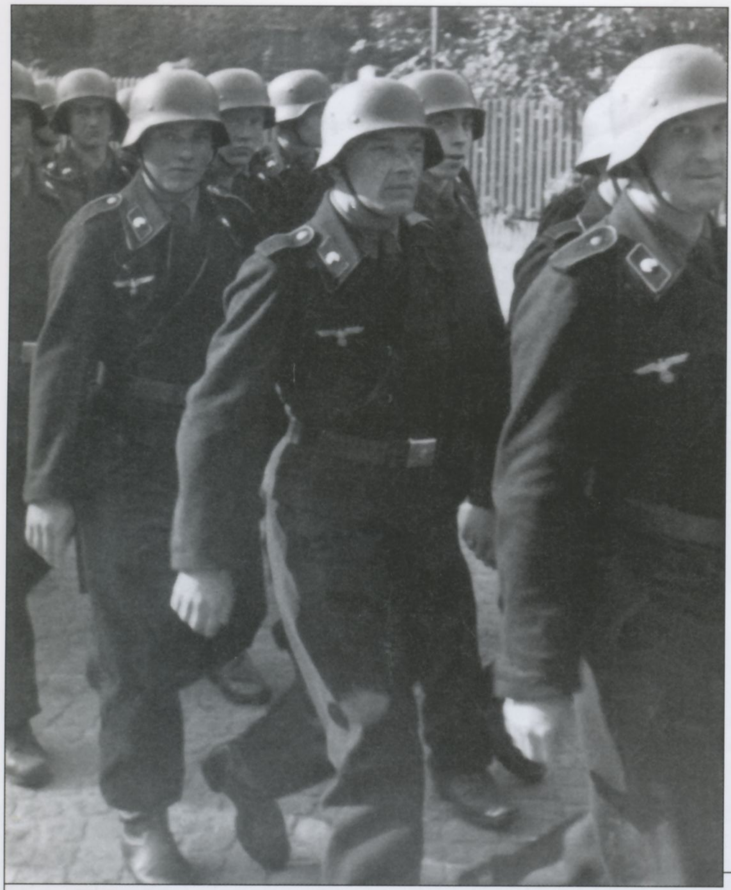
This Army crew of an 8.8cm Flak gun has obviously been hard at work. Support units were usually only issued a single three-pocket cartridge pouch holding 30 rounds. Combat units received two such pouches. The 8.8cm rounds were shipped three to a wicked container. Such containers, common to all types of artillery ammunition, were not simply discarded, but evacuated and returned to factories.

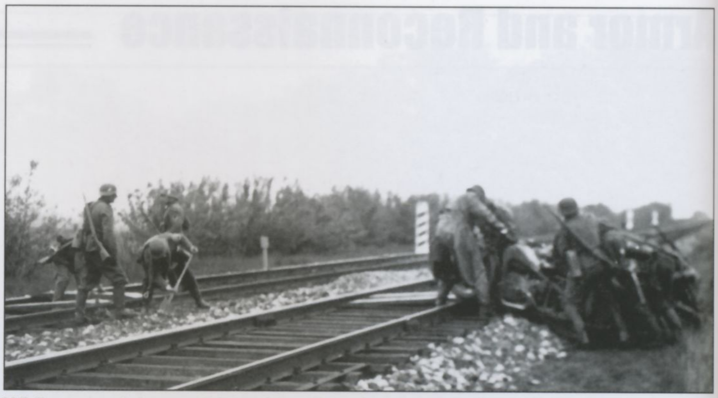


A column of tanks move to the front. Four Panzer divisions were committed to the invasion of the Yugoslavia. Note the German national flags on their engine decks for air-to-ground identification. To the right can be seen parked maintenance trucks.



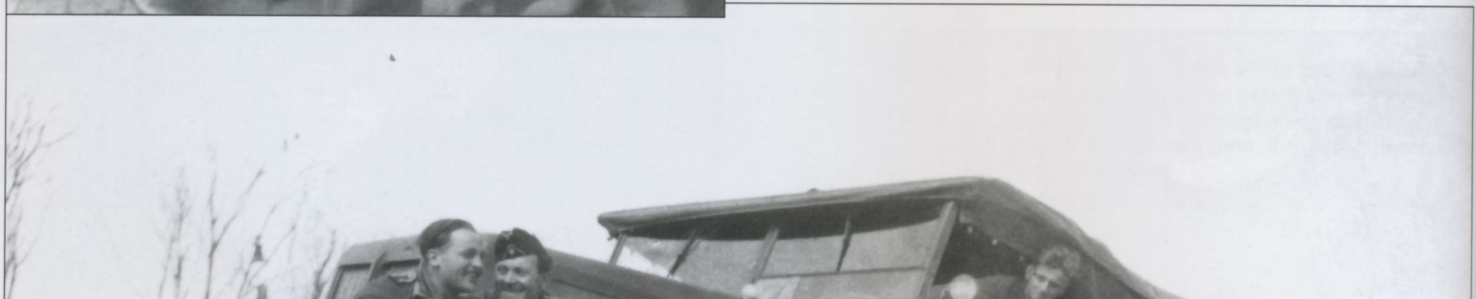
Waffen-SS mounted troops relax in a farm yard. Waffen-SS troops were identifiable by the Death Head badge on the front of their field caps, black collar tabs—with silver runic "SS" on the right collar and traditional SS rank insignia on the left, special SS silver on black national eagle centered on the left upper sleeve, and Heeres-style rank shoulder straps on black backings rather than the Heeres dark green or field gray. Like Heeres NCOs, they wear 9mm side silver braid on the collars.





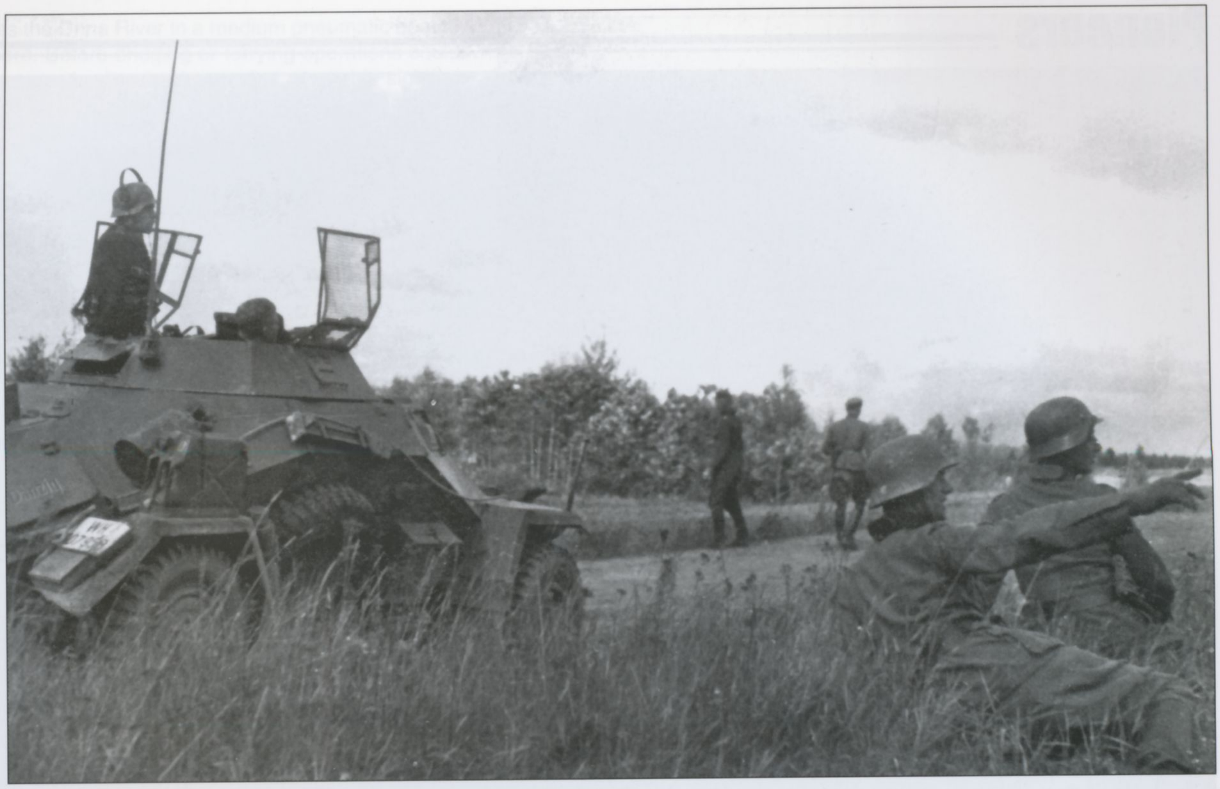
While one might not think of a railroad on a low gravel roadbed to be much of a vehicle obstacle, it actually proves to be a significant barrier for a combination motorcycle. Here half a dozen men manhandle a heavy motorcycle and its sidecar over a double-line track with the aid of planks bridging the space between the rails. Other men shovel gravel to make a small ramp to ease their struggles. Under fire a simple rail line was just as much an obstacle to motorcycles as an antitank ditch.

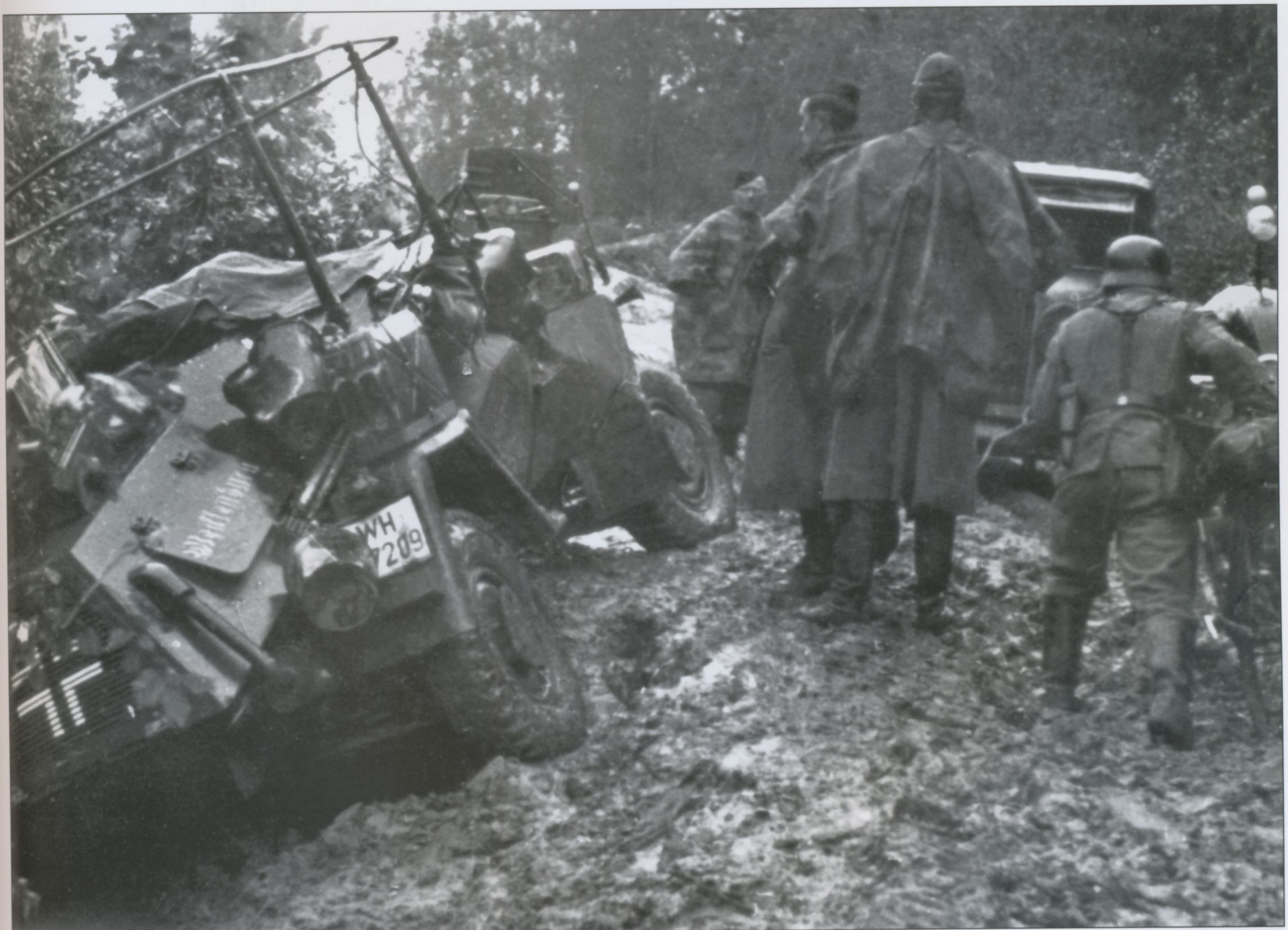
Panzermänner wearing their black uniforms adorned with pink Waffenfarbe of the Panzertruppen edging they shoulder straps and collar tabs parade for company orders. Beneath the black jacket they wear a mouse gray shirt and black necktie. The black beret (Schutzmütze) with an integral protective helmet had been withdrawn in January 1941 and the standard steel helmet in field gray was worn in its place when head protection was necessary. A black field cap was also available. The belt is brown and the boots black.



Two Panzertruppen clown around aboard a rail flatcar carrying a 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack. These were sometimes used as recovery vehicles by Panzer units. Note they wear the black trousers and field cap of the Panzer uniform, but the standard field gray tunic, an unauthorized practice. Panzertruppen were also issued the field gray uniform as their black uniform was only worn when operating their tanks. An exception was made of this practice in combat zones and they usually wore only the distinctive black uniform. Note the white painted front and rear fenders. These markings allowed the vehicle to be seen more easily by other vehicles during blackout driving conditions.

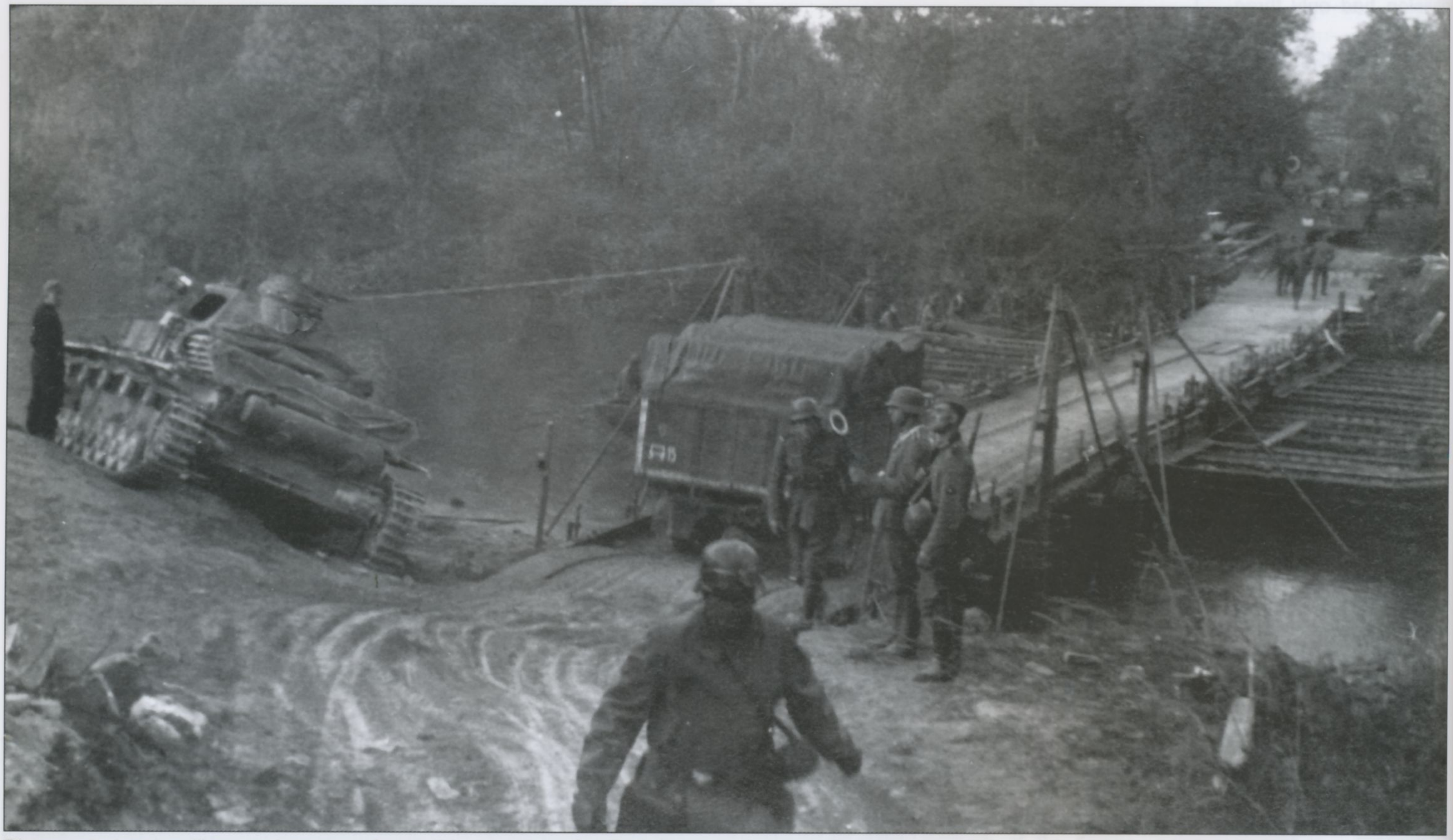
The reconnaissance battalion of an infantry division had only three light armored reconnaissance cars (leichter Panzerspähwagen), in fact these were the only three armored fighting vehicle in a normal infantry division. This is an SdKfz 222 cannon vehicle (Kanonenwagen) armed with a 2cm automatic cannon and a 7.9mm MG34 machine gun. The screen anti-grenade covers are open. They also protected the crew from light falling debris and low tree limbs.



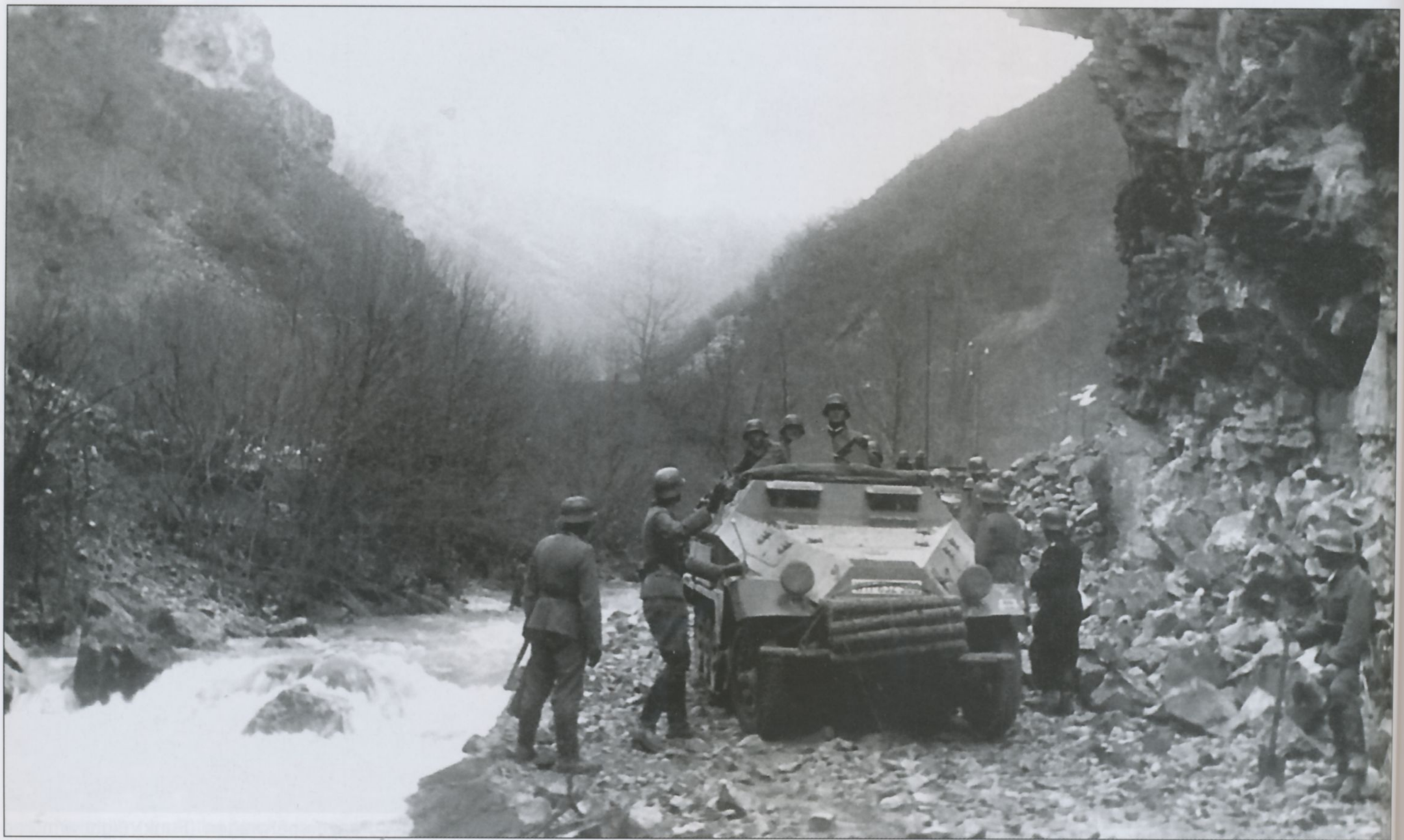


The third armored car of a reconnaissance battalion was an SdKfz 223 Funkwagen (radio vehicle) or leichter Panzerspähwagen (Funk) (light armored reconnaissance car [radio]). It had a folding "bed frame" antenna, which could be lowered to reduce it profile, when traversing though areas with low tree limbs, and during rail transport. It was armed with a 7.9mm MG34 machine gun. The Funkwagen accompanied the other two scout cars to report intelligence information back to the battalion. It had a crew of four.

Pioneers

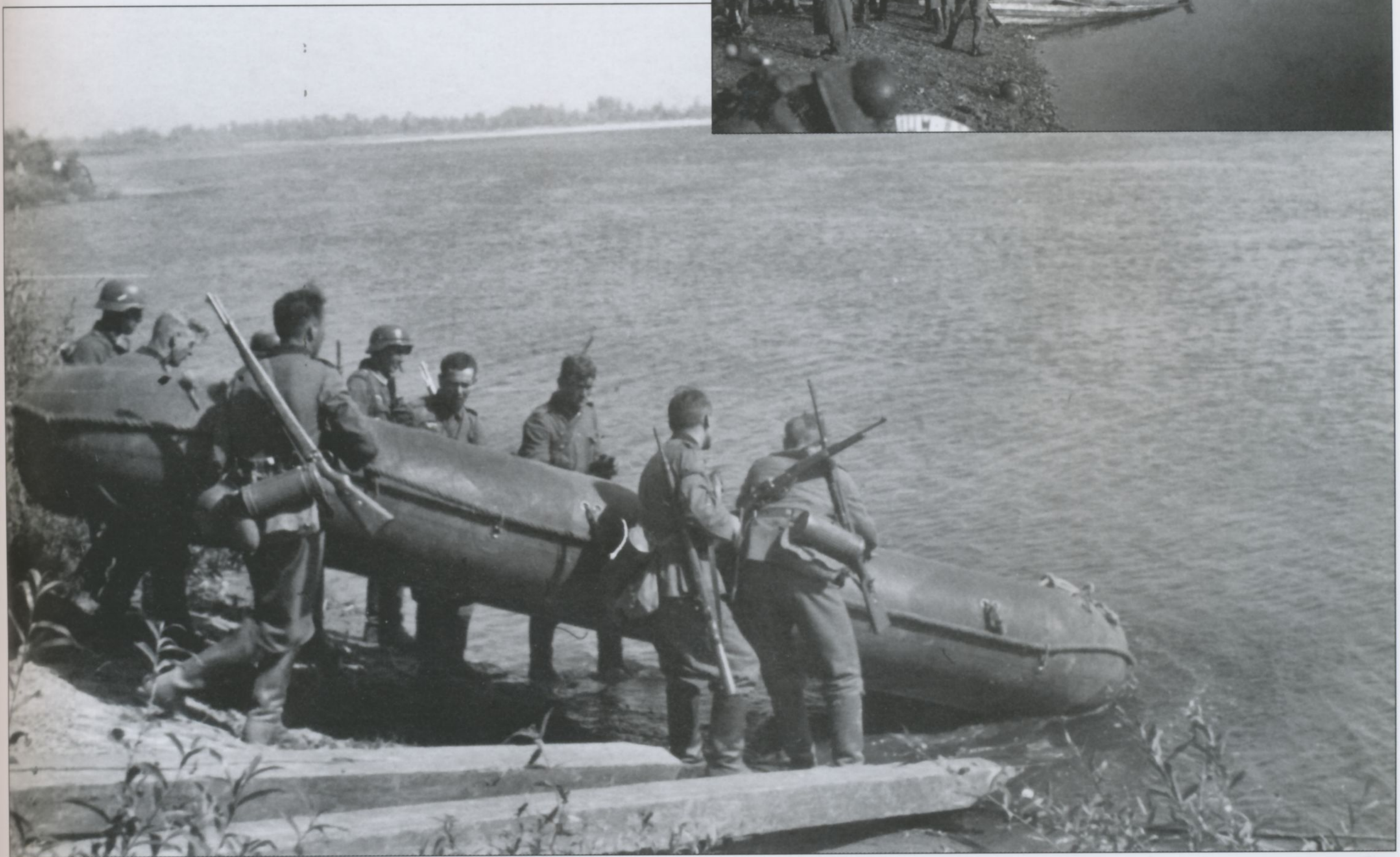


Rivers, streams, gullies, and gorges were widespread in the Balkans keeping the pioneer troops gainfully employed. Here medium pontoons boats (Brückengerät T) are used to span a large stream by XIV.Armeekorps (motorisiert) as Feldgendarmerie (field military police) direct traffic. The parked PzKpfw IV has probably suffered a mechanical breakdown, a common occurrence on a road march.

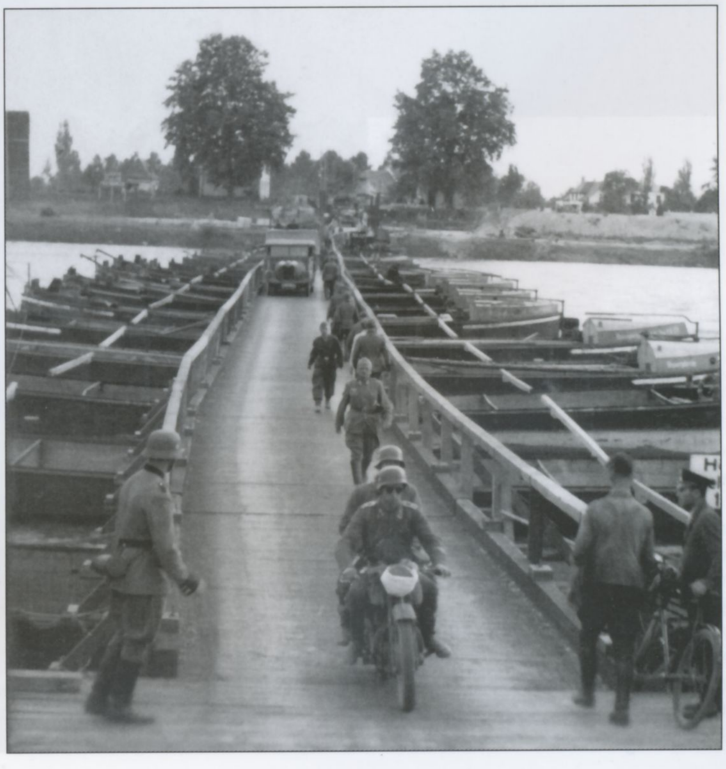


An SdKfz 251/1 armored personnel carrier test drives a streamside road widened and improved by pioneer troops in the Stara Mountains. The half-tracked Schützenpanzerwagen (rifleman's armored vehicle or SPW) was not widely available at this time. The short logs lashed to the front are aid when crossing small ditches and holes plus provide a limited degree of protection from small arms fire.

Pioneer troops paddle across the Drina River in a medium pneumatic boat to reconnoiter the opposite shore. Before bridging or ferrying operations could begin it was necessary to ensure the far shore provided a suitable sighting for bridge abutments or a ferry landing site, that it was not swampy or flooded, and that the site allowed egress to a road.

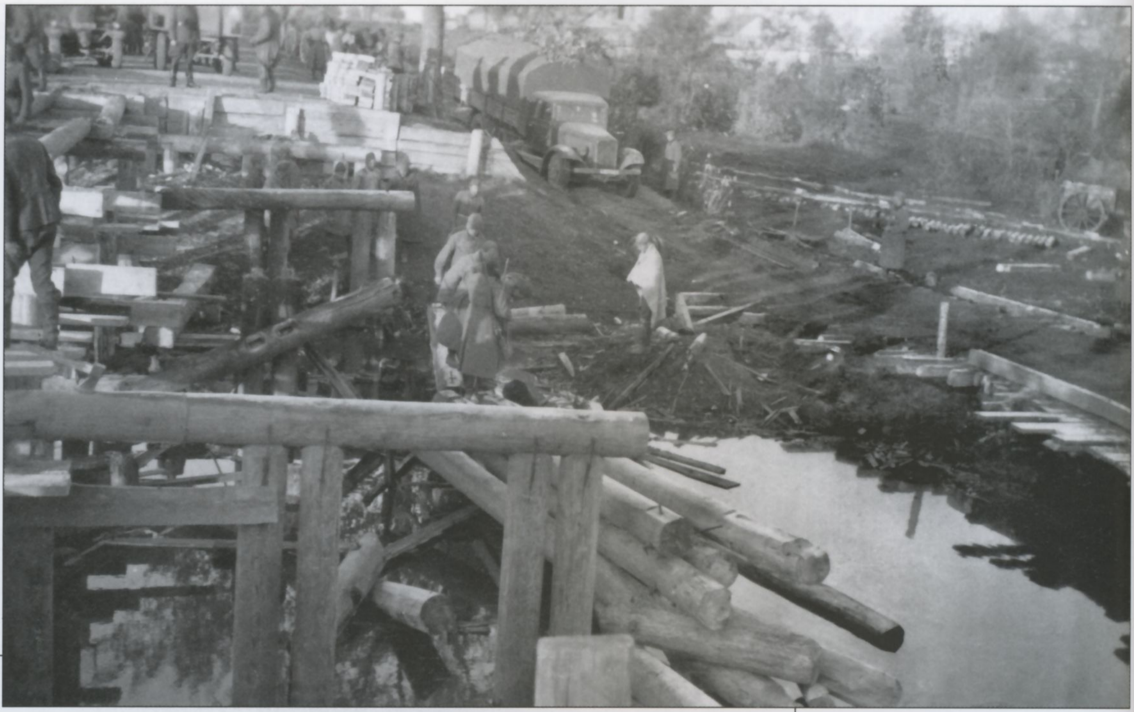


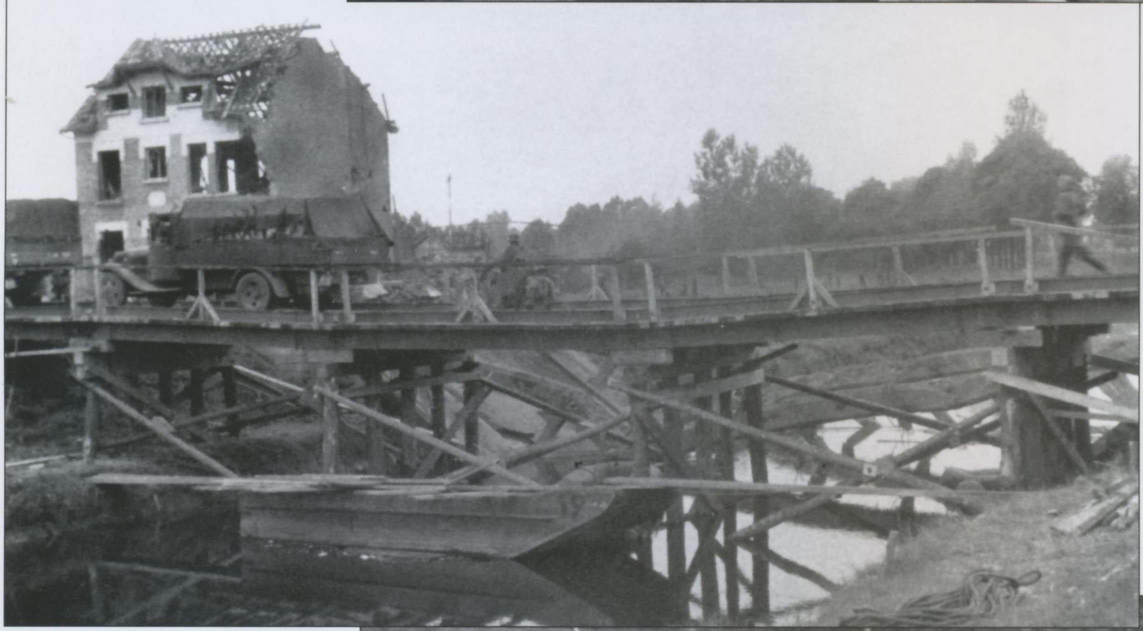
Pioneers troops launch a medium pneumatic boat to conduct a reconnaissance of the far shore. These boats were greenish-gray rubber. The boats could also be used to make pontoon bridges for foot traffic. Pairs of boats could be fitted with wooden bridge section decking and used to ferry light crew-served weapons across a river such as 3.7cm antitank guns, 7.5cm infantry guns, and mortars as well as motorcycles.



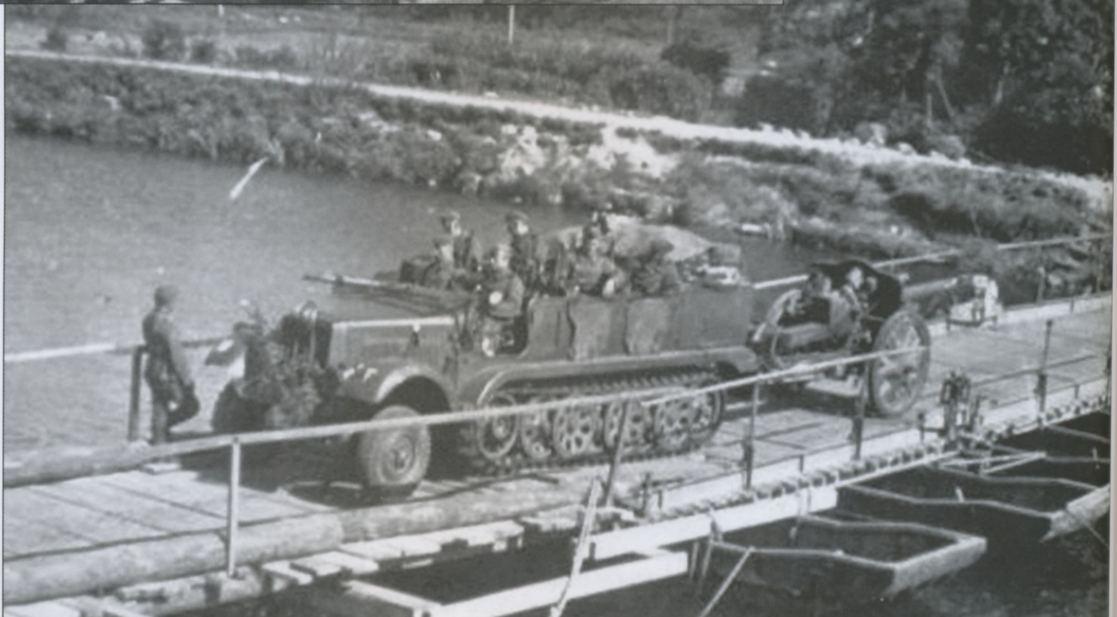
Here bridge construction pioneers have constructed a float bridge using impounded civilian river cargo boats. The boats could probably support a two-lane bridge, but time and/or materials may not have been available for a more elaborate bridge. Note the timer spacer bars the pioneers fixed to the boats' gunnels to prevent them shifting in the river current.

Here a cargo truck by-passes a timber bridge construction site on a temporary log and earth fill bridge. The Germans employed specialized bridge construction (Brückenbau) units attached to army and corps troops. Note the heavy iron staples sledge-hammered into the beams and support posts.

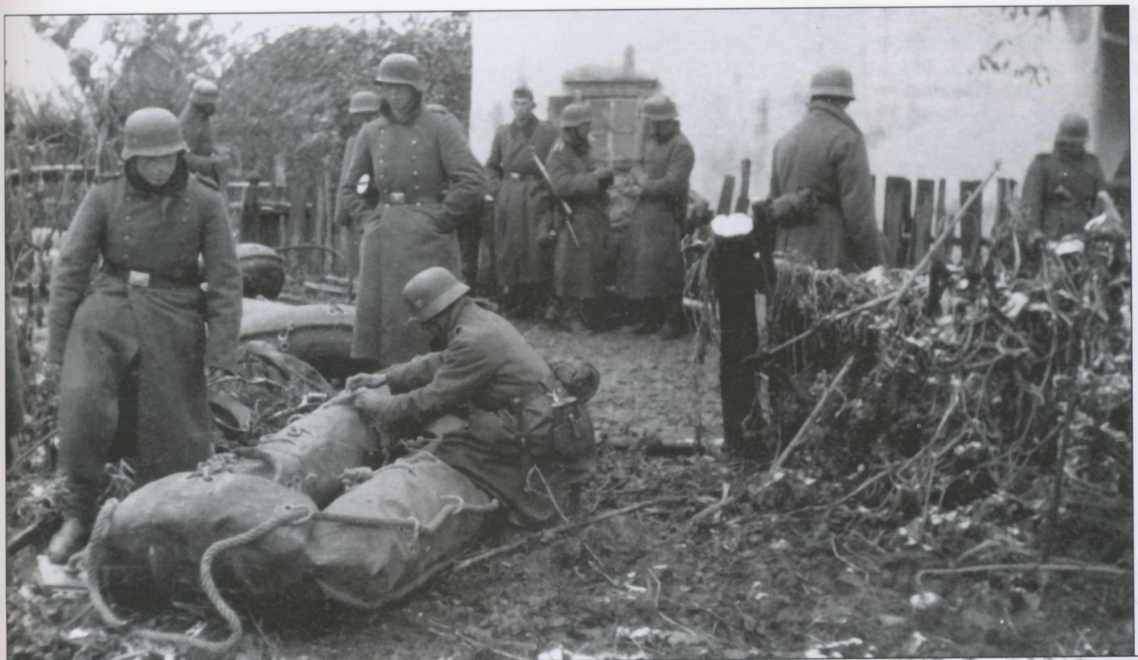


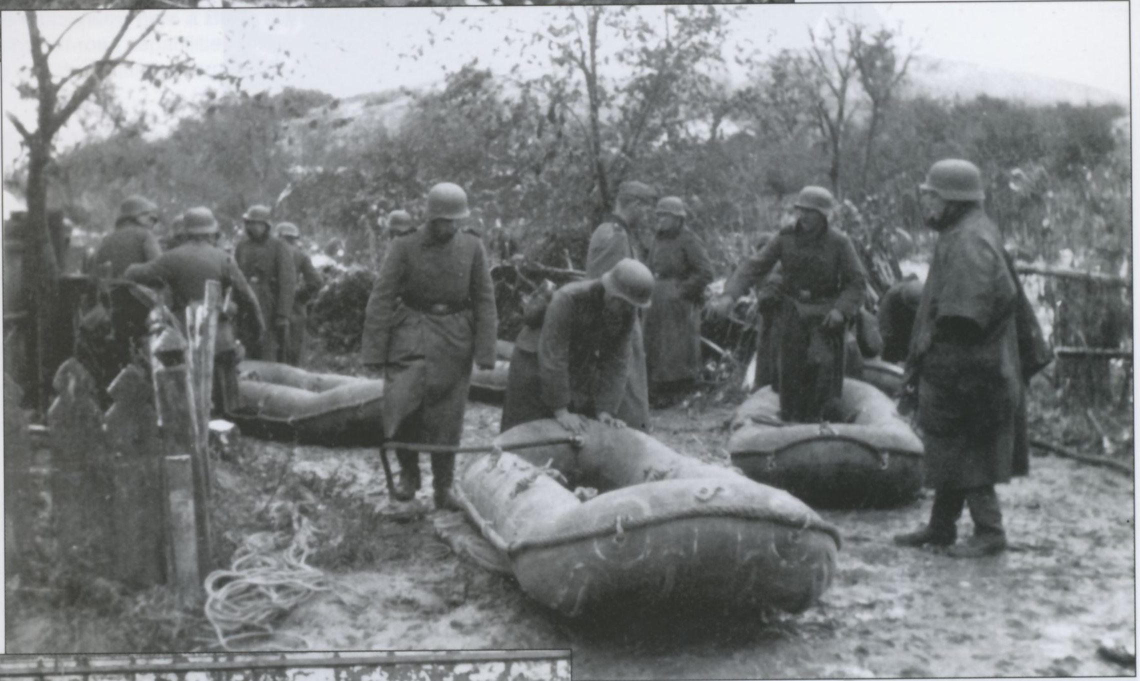


Traffic passes over a hastily built temporary bridge. Behind it can be seen the bomb-damaged original bridge's wreckage. In the foreground is half of a Brückengerät B heavy pontoon boat. Two such 50-foot (15-meter) sections would be fitted together amid ships to form a complete pontoon. A single section could float on its own. The pontoon section support a hasty footbridge constructed of planks, to keep the main bridge open for vehicle traffic. A heavy bridge column (Brückenkolonne B) had eight such pontoon sections.

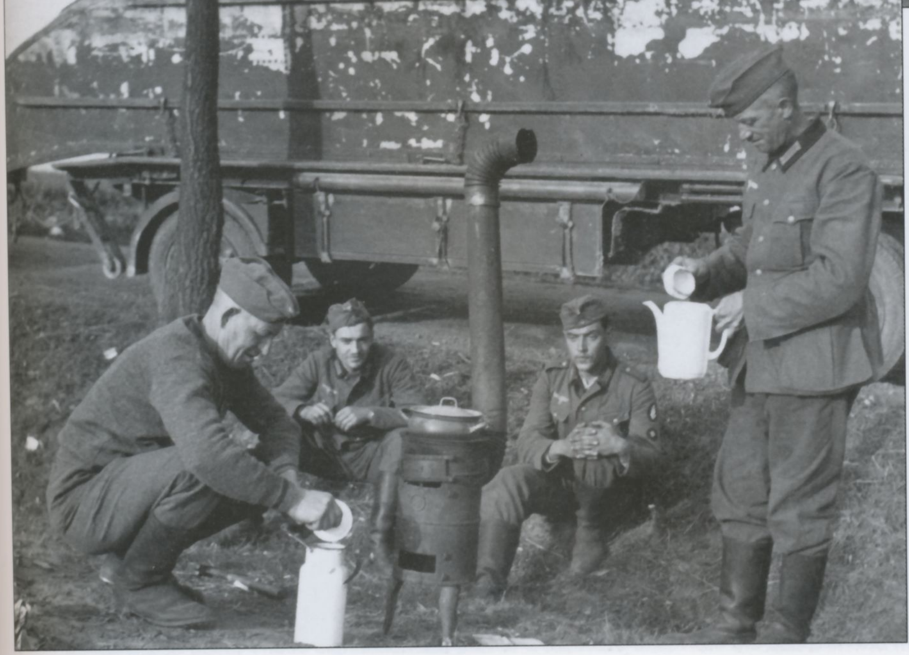


A 5-ton SdKfz 6 medium halftrack tows a 10.5cm lFH18 light field howitzer across a pontoon bridge supported by Brückengerät B heavy pontoon boats. It bridges a small barge canal.



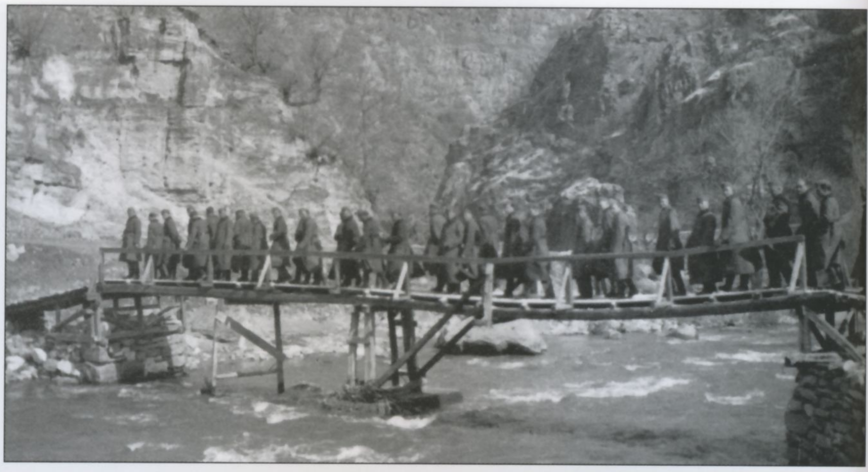


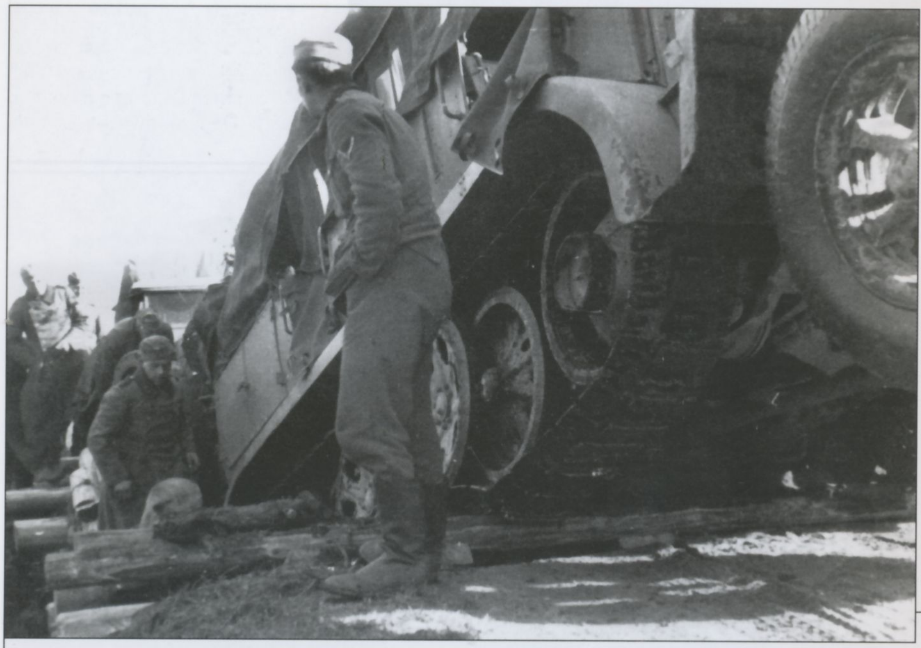
Pioneer troops inflate small pneumatic boats to conduct a reconnaissance. Individuals can be seen operating inflation foot pumps. These boats could carry four men, two on each side straddling the tube and paddling. Divisional pioneer battalions were equipped with a number of these boats and infantry units could use them. The pioneers trained the infantrymen in their use, but one pioneer often stayed with the boat to provide his expertise.



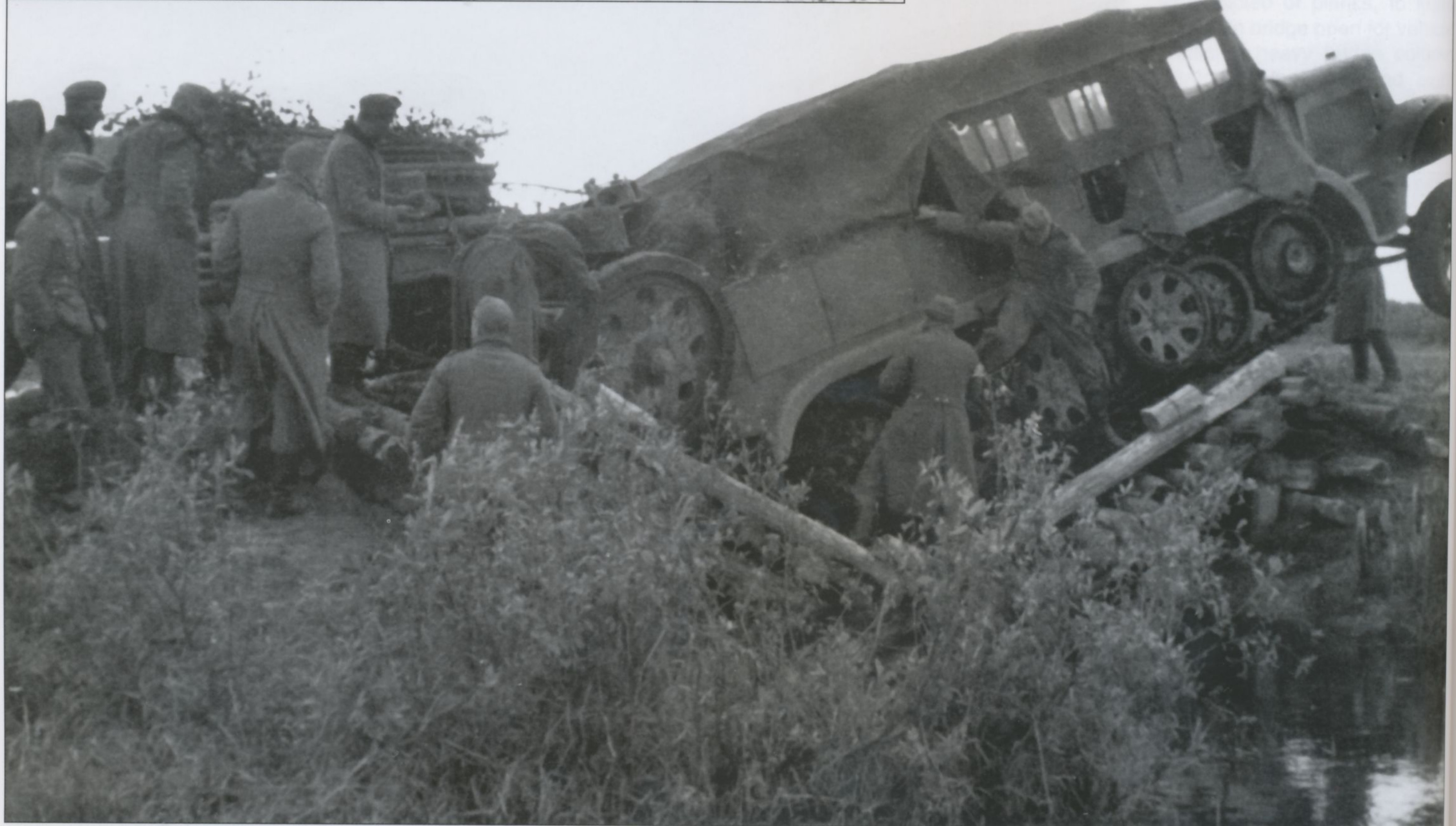
Bridge construction troops heat up soup and coffee during a rest halt on a portable wood-burning stove. The man to the left wears the field gray wool knit sweater normally worn under the tunic in cold weather. The second man from the right displays a Helmsman (Steuermann) badge over his Oberpionier rank star. The oval badge depicts an anchor and a ship's steering wheel. Behind them is a Pf 11 Pontonwagen towed by a 3-ton cargo truck. It required two such trailers to carry the two (fore and aft) sections of a single heavy pontoon (Brückengerät B). The two pontoon sections were identical and fitted together amidships.

Pioneer troops demonstrate their confidence in their hasty reinforcement efforts on a mountain stream footbridge. Many such bridges had to be frequently replaced owing to the spring flooding snowmelt and heavy rains. While appearing insignificant, the loss of these small bridges could create many difficulties for frontline units, especially in regards to ammunition and ration supply and the evacuation of casualties.

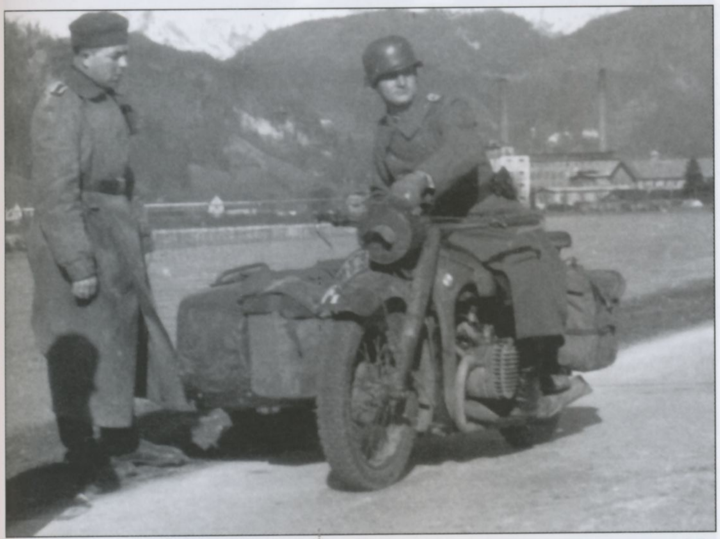




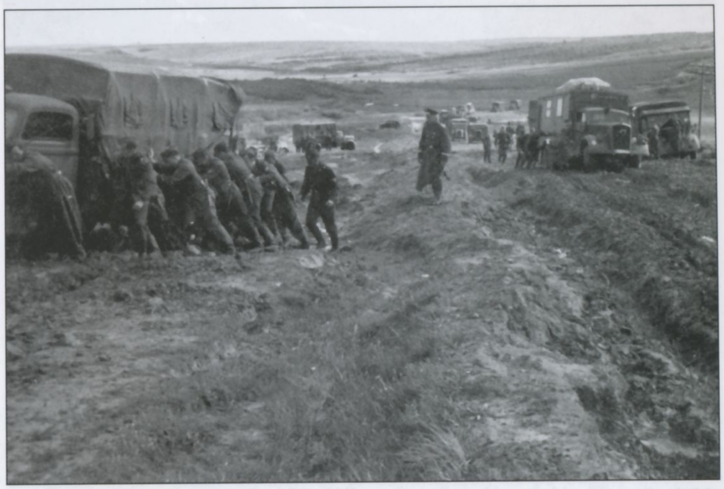
Yet another job for the overworked pioneers after a 12-ton SdKfz 8 halftrack towing a 15cm sFH18 howitzer attempted to cross a timber traffic-weakened bridge that could not withstand repeated use by heavy vehicles. Such a bridge failure caused real problems and hundreds of vehicles could be jammed up to the rear as it would require several hours to construct a new hasty bridge.



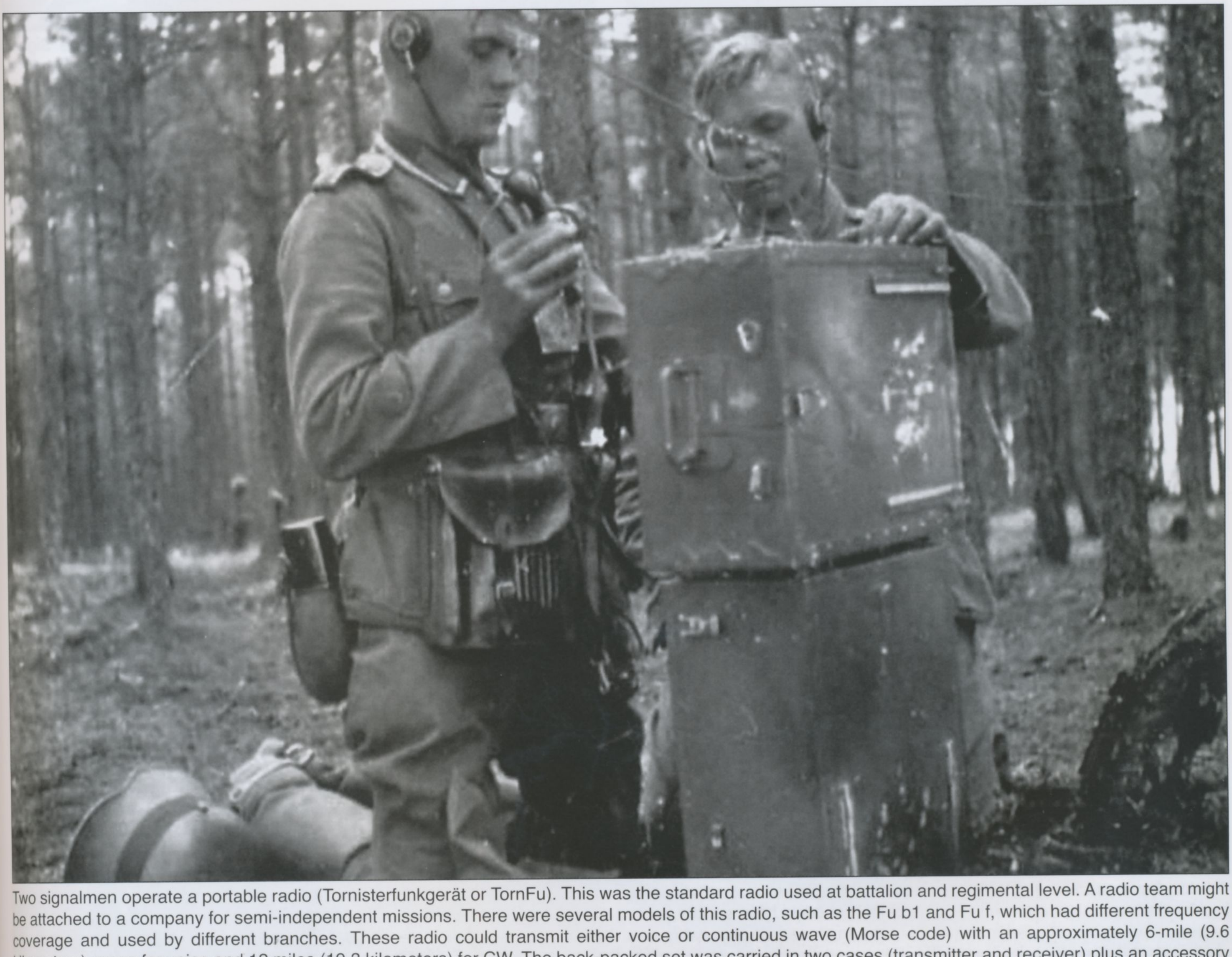
Signals



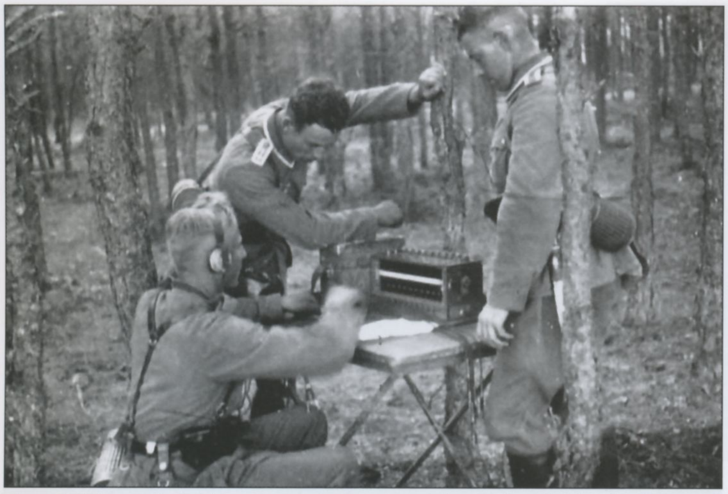
Motorcycle couriers were an important means of communications rapidly delivering orders, maps, overlays, and other documents to units. Heavy motorcycles were built for speed and robustness, here a BMW combination motorcycle with a sidecar, had marginal off-road capabilities and performed very poorly in mud, especially in hilly and mountainous terrain.



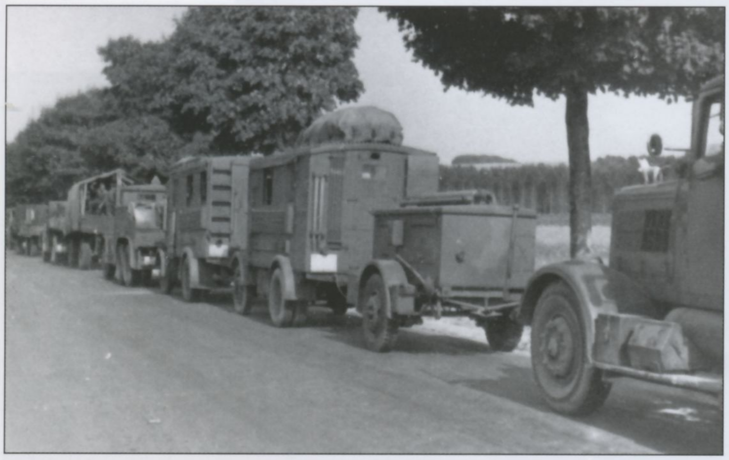
The going was so difficult on this overly-rutted road that one truck of this signals unit has been pushed off the road in an effort to make some advance. In the center, clad in a greatcoat is the company Hauptfeldwebel. Signals troops wore lemon yellow Waffenfarbe.



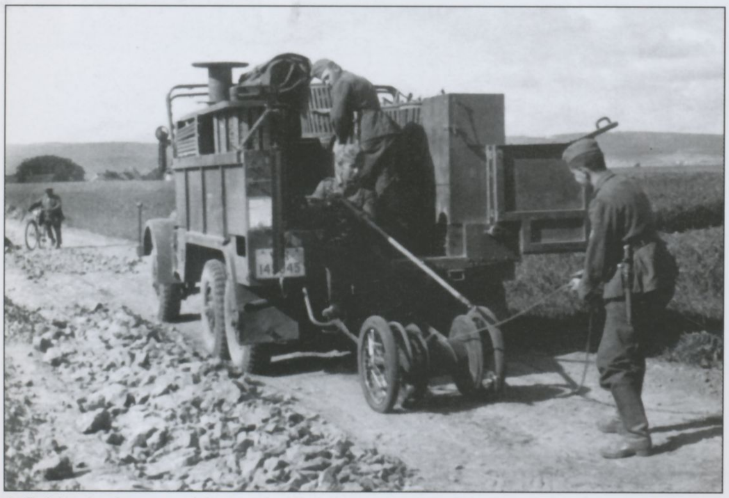
Two signalmen operate a portable radio (Tornisterfunkgerät or TornFu). This was the standard radio used at battalion and regimental level. A radio team might be attached to a company for semi-independent missions. There were several models of this radio, such as the Fu b1 and Fu f, which had different frequency coverage and used by different branches. These radio could transmit either voice or continuous wave (Morse code) with an approximately 6-mile (9.6 kilometers) range for voice and 12 miles (19.3 kilometers) for CW. The back-packed set was carried in two cases (transmitter and receiver) plus an accessory case and could not be operated on the move, but had to be set up and an antenna rigged. Here a wire antenna has been strung between trees. Pole-type antennas were also used. These signalmen are part of a mounted unit. Note the spurs on the man's boots to the left.



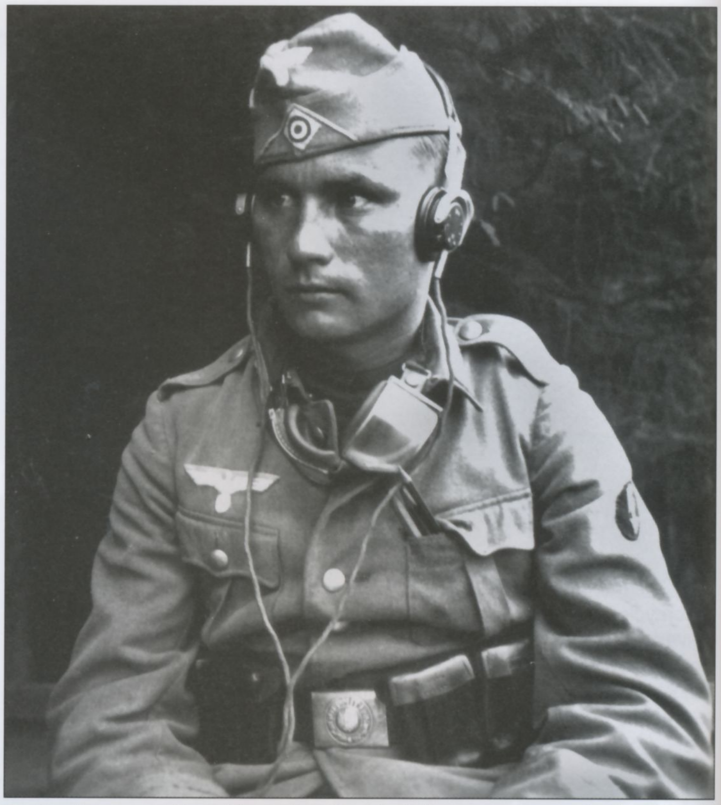
Two NCOs wait to be connected to a subunit by field telephone. A switchboard operator, called a Strippenzieher (line-plugger), makes the connection. The kleiner Verteilerschrank für 10 Leitungen (small switchboard for 10 lines) required a separate field telephone for the operator rather than an integral telephone. The telephone is the Feldernsprecher 33.



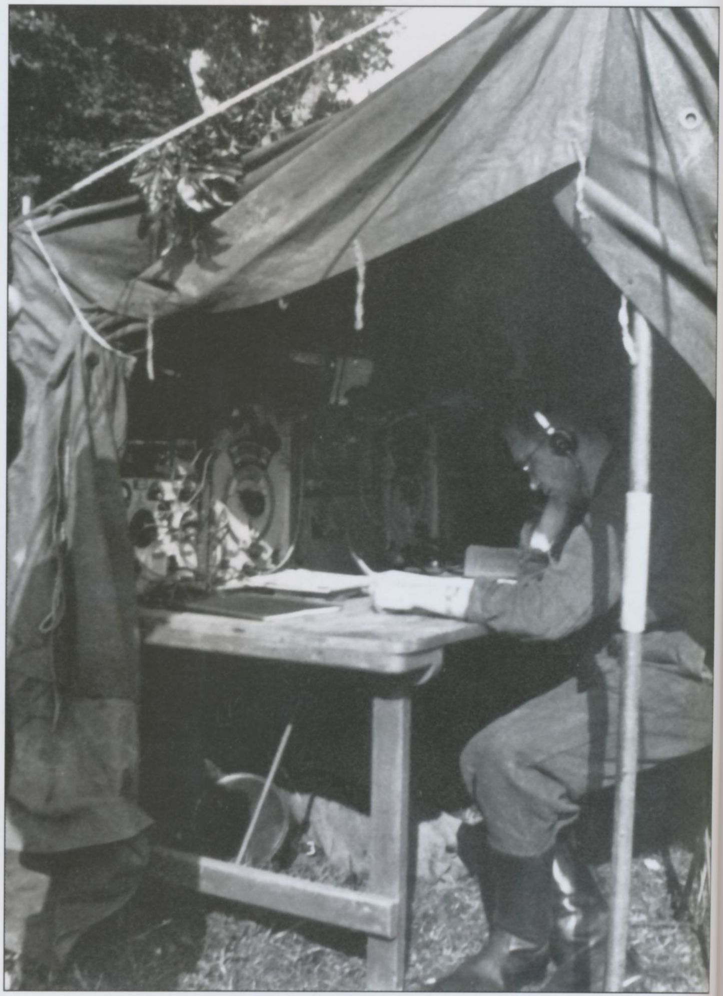
Signals units possessed more specialized vehicles than any other type of unit. Various types of radio trucks (Funkkraftwagen) are seen here with sectional antenna racks on their sides. The trailer contains a heavy power generator (schwerer Maschinensatz).



A field telephone cable truck (Feldfernkabelkraftwagen) tows a small cable reel as it strings telephone cable. This type of reel could be drawn by hand or behind a bicycle. Stowed in the back of the truck and on side racks are sectional poles used for temporary poles. For speed and when wire would be laid for only temporary use it was simply laid on the round. This though made it susceptible to breakage by friendly vehicle traffic.



A signalman monitors his radio. On his left upper sleeve is the Signals Personnel Badge (Nachrichtenpersonal Abzeichen). This was worn only by signalmen assigned to non-signals units. The oval badge had a dark green backing is a lightning bolt in the unit's Waffenfarbe, here infantry white.



A radio operator records information from a message. The equipment in front of him is a 5 WSc transmitter.

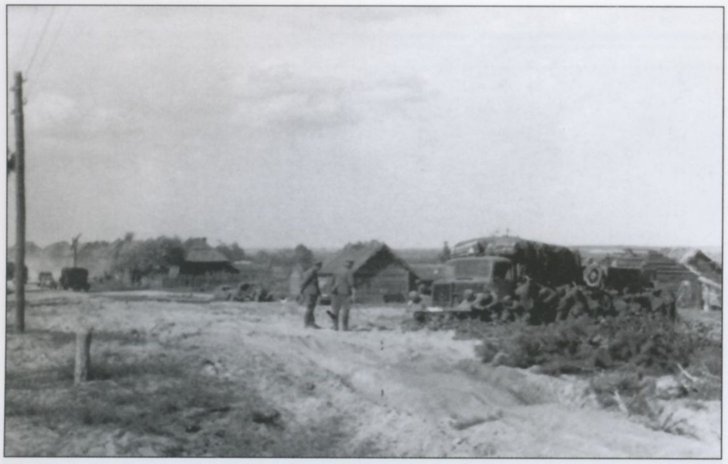
Transport

It was quickly and painfully realized after crossing the Hungarian border that the invaders faced a crude and underdeveloped road system. Virtually all roads were dirt, or rather mud, and could not stand up under heavy use. Many bridges could not bear the heavy truck loads much less the weight of tanks and artillery.

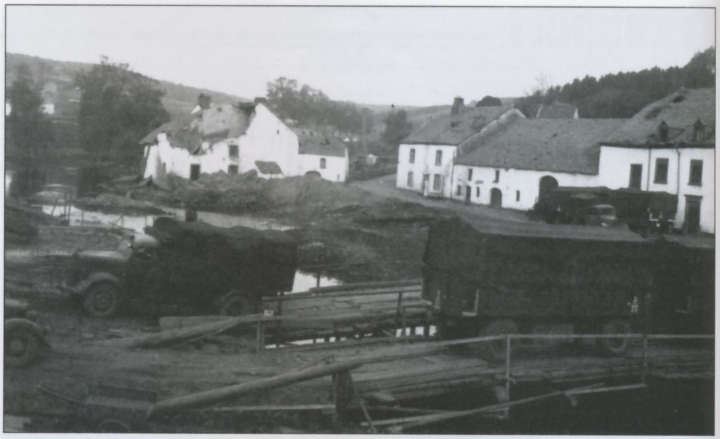
A supply transport column on the road to Belgrade. This is probably a column assigned to a Panzer division or to commander, corps supply troops. A "column" (Kolonne) was a company-size subunit within supply transport and pioneer bridging units.

Many German vehicles had only two-wheel rear drive and were not capable of all-wheel-drive being developed for improved German road conditions. Even if possessing all-wheel drive the bottomless mud caused vehicles to belly out, that is, the underside of their frames to drag and then dip into the mud making it impossible to even push them out.

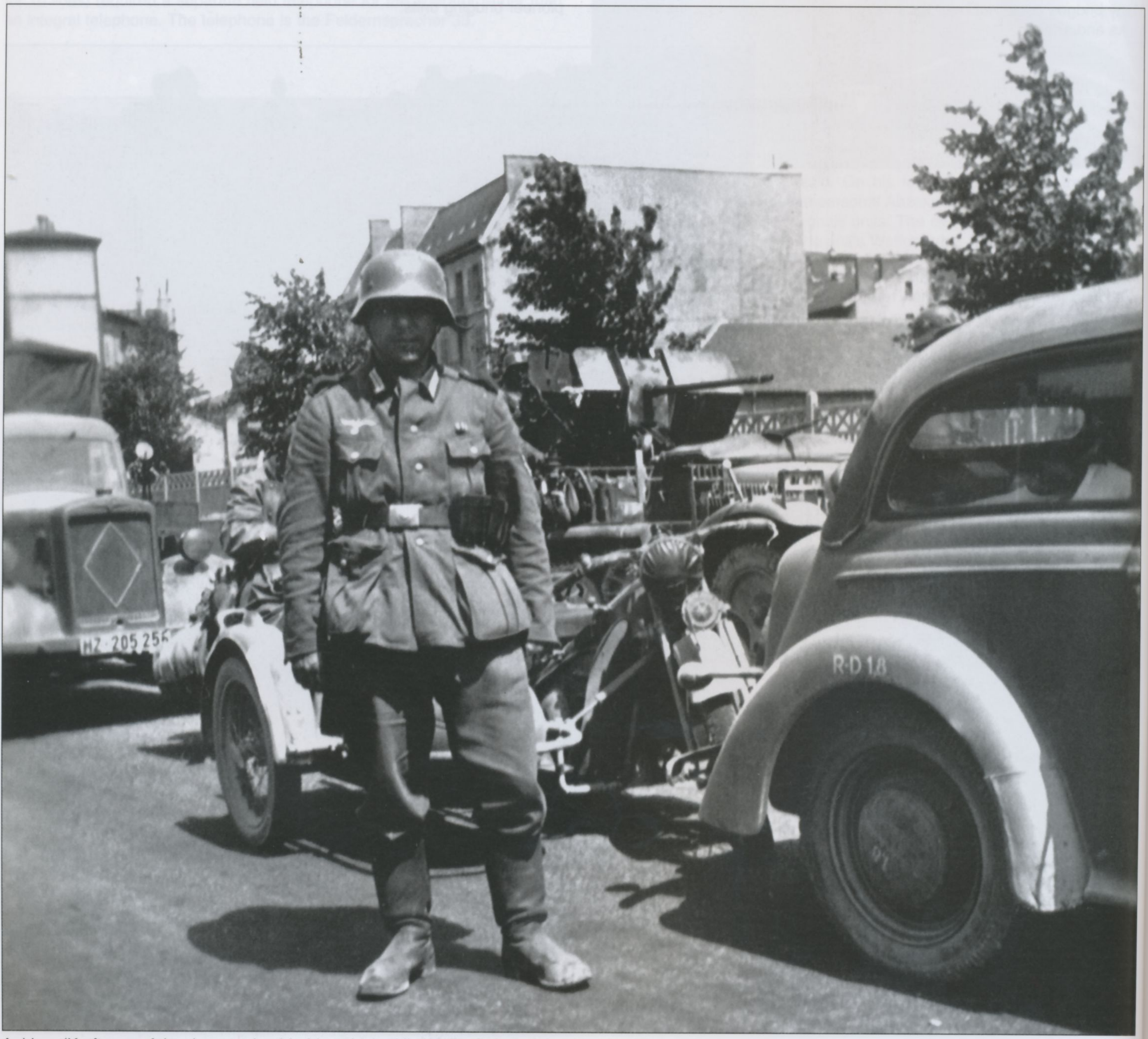
What began as a two-lane road would gradually widen as the original lanes were churned to mud and truck traffic edged on to the shoulders in order to bypass the ever deepening mud. Such roads in peacetime seldom saw much motorized vehicle traffic being intended by house-drawn wagons.



Mud was bad enough, but in dry weather trucks became mired in sand and potholes. Here supply troops struggle to push a cargo truck from its night lager. Note how rugged the dirt road in the foreground is. Such poor quality roads would be encountered in Russia before long.

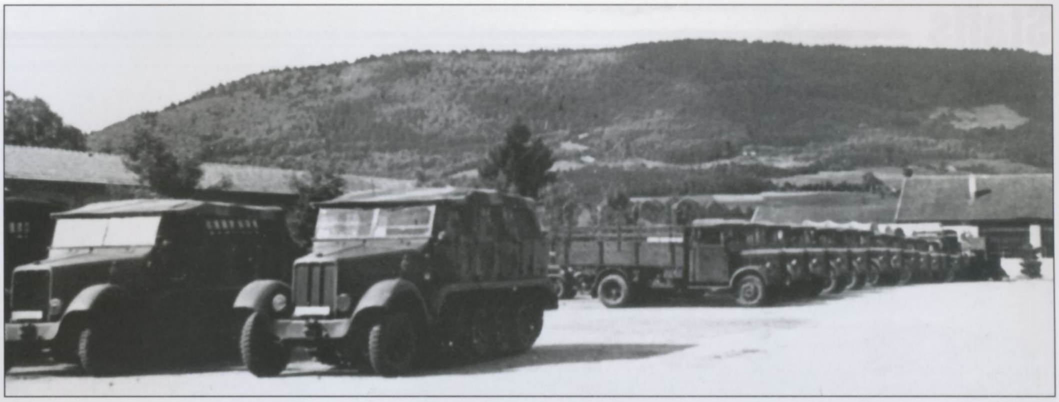


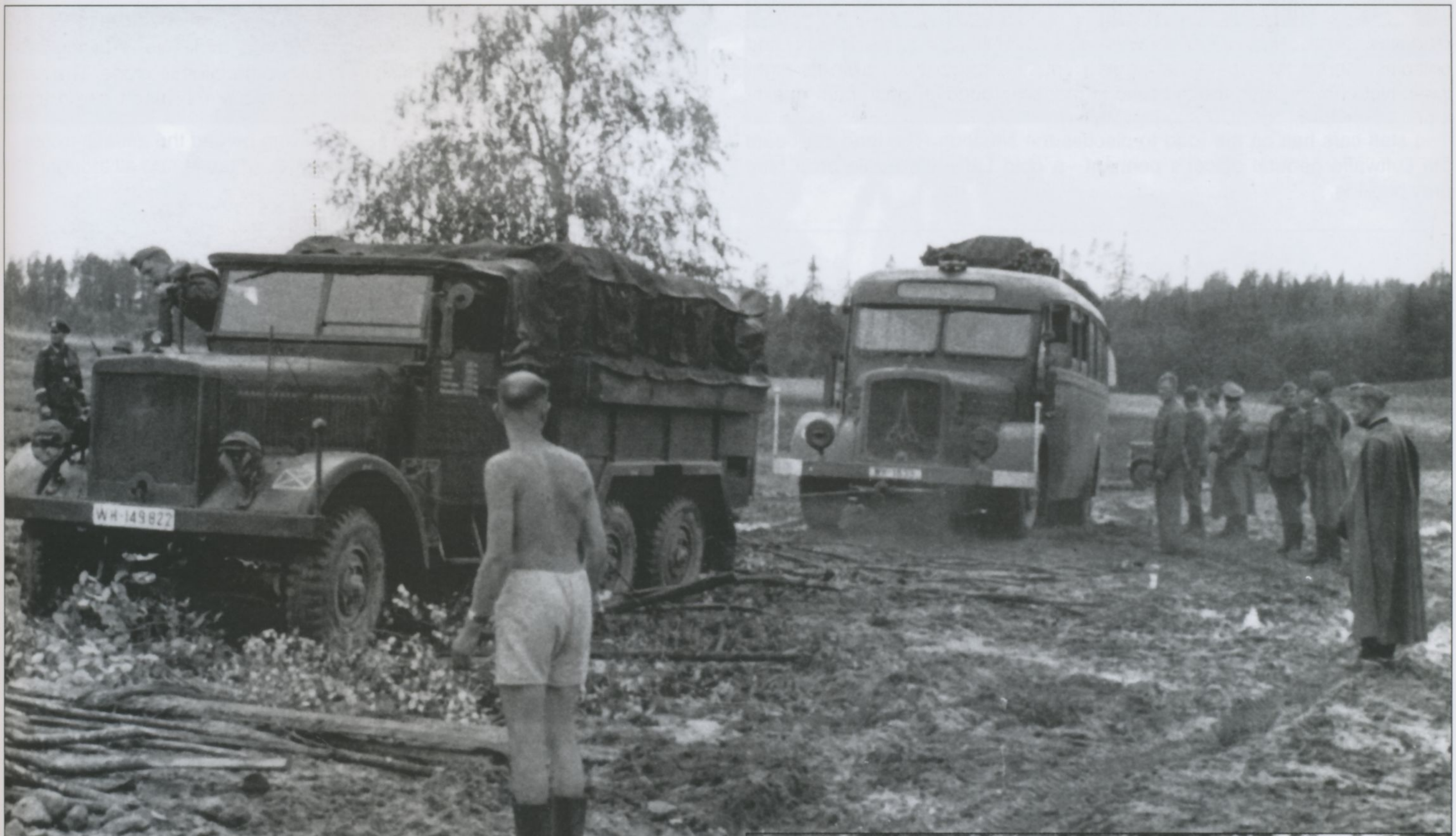
In a shell-battered town two side-by-side bridges have been built to allow two-way traffic. Often only one-lane bridges were available requiring traffic controllers to alternately allow traffic from either direction to cross. The cargo truck is towing a 5-ton E5 standard trailer. This widely used cargo trailer could carry a 5,000-kilogram payload.



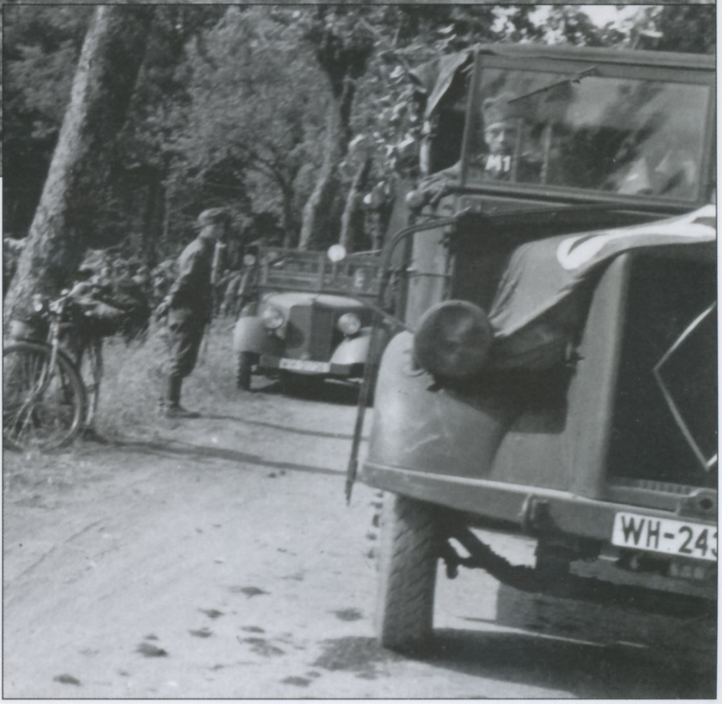
A driver (Kraftwagenfahrer) poses beside his vehicle. His Waffenfarbe edging his shoulder straps would be light blue. In the background can be seen a 2cm Flak 30 mounted on a 1-ton SdKfz 10/5 halftrack.

A transport unit's motor park. The Germans used scores of makes and models of trucks to include those of occupied countries. Transport units often had a couple of halftracks for use as recovery and towing vehicles. These were not on the normal unit establishment, but were a special authorization in the east owing to the poor roads and General Mud. These are 8-ton SdKfz 7 medium halftracks.



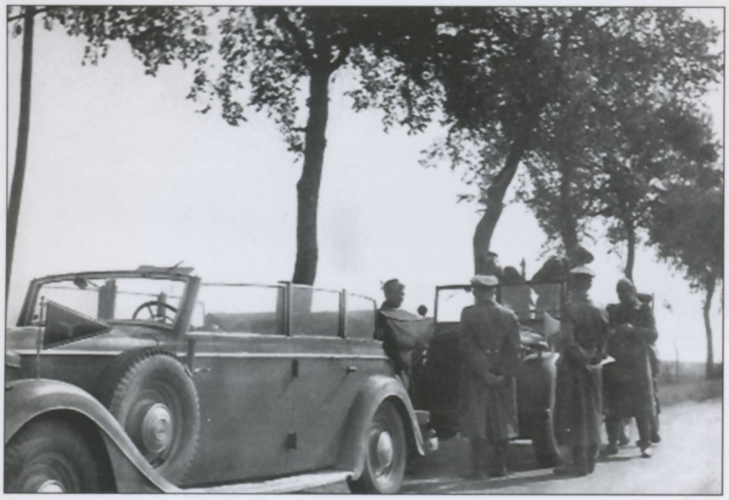


A 5-ton heavy cargo truck tows a Magirus motor bus (Kraftomnibus) out of the mud at a stream crossing ford. Buses, while certainly not cross-country vehicles, proved valuable to carry troops and equipment. Limbs have been laid as a crude corduroy road to prevent vehicles from bogging down on the muddy shore.

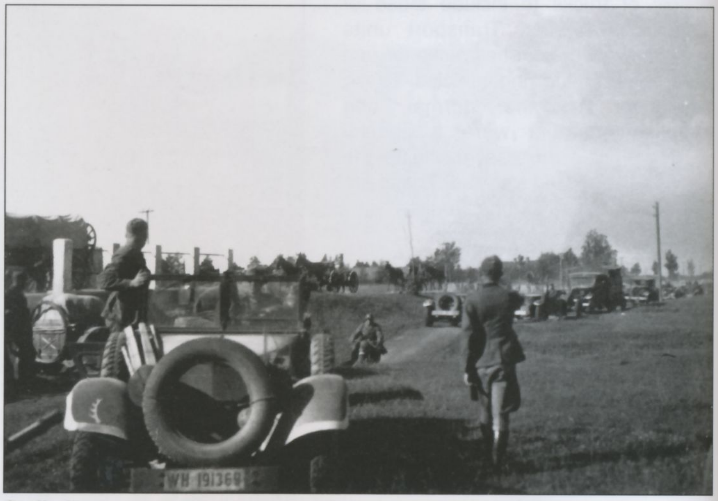


A convoy bypasses a cratered road (off-camera) with a guide posted. The German national flag (Reichsflagge) is secured to the hood of the truck as a means of air-to-ground recognition. National flags were similarly placed on armored fighting vehicles on the rear engine deck. Attack by friendly aircraft was a major concern and a not uncommon occurrence.

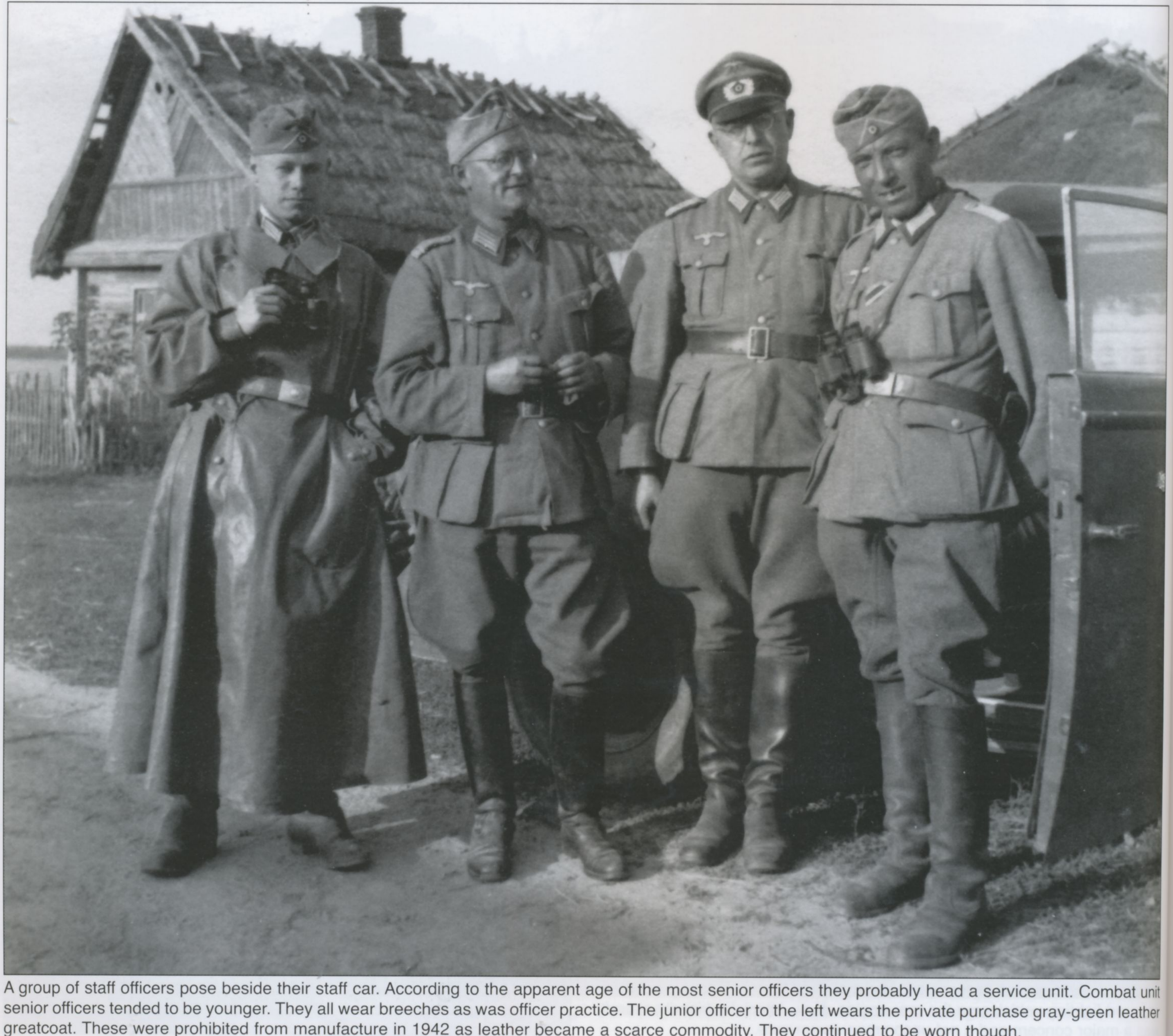
Staffs



Two staff cars halt on the road to discuss the situation. The lead car bears the Luftwaffe general officer's pennant—a gold Luftwaffe eagle on a blue gray backing.

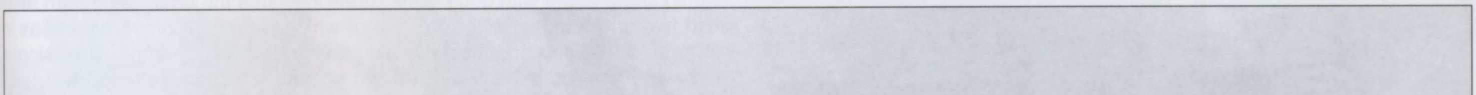


Staff officers attempt to control traffic advancing behind the assault troops. It was common for units to intermingle during the advance and all thought they had the more important mission.



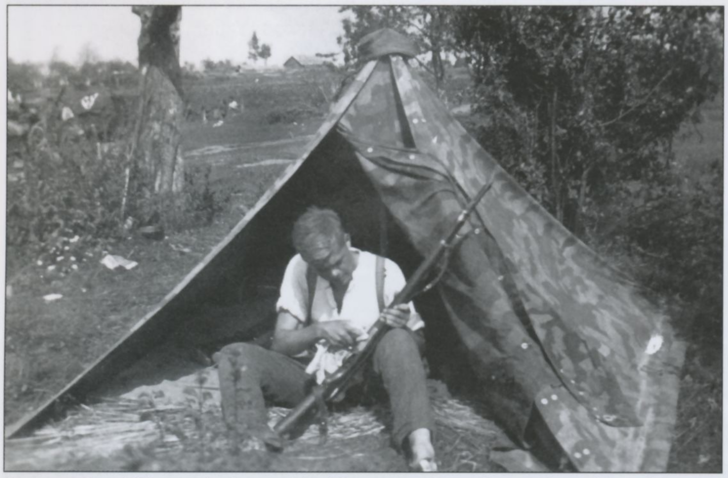
A group of staff officers pose beside their staff car. According to the apparent age of the most senior officers they probably head a service unit. Combat unit senior officers tended to be younger. They all wear breeches as was officer practice. The junior officer to the left wears the private purchase gray-green leather greatcoat. These were prohibited from manufacture in 1942 as leather became a scarce commodity. They continued to be worn though.

A staff officer observes a motorized unit en route to the front. Much of what staff officers did once action commenced was liaison and coordination to keep the operation moving.

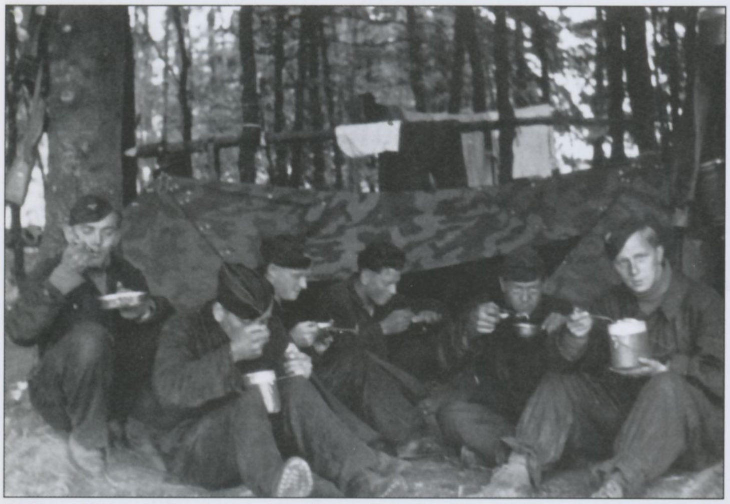


Staff officers cross a stream aboard a heavy cross-country personnel car Kfz 12 (schwerer geländegängiger Personenkraftwagen). It carried a driver and five passengers.

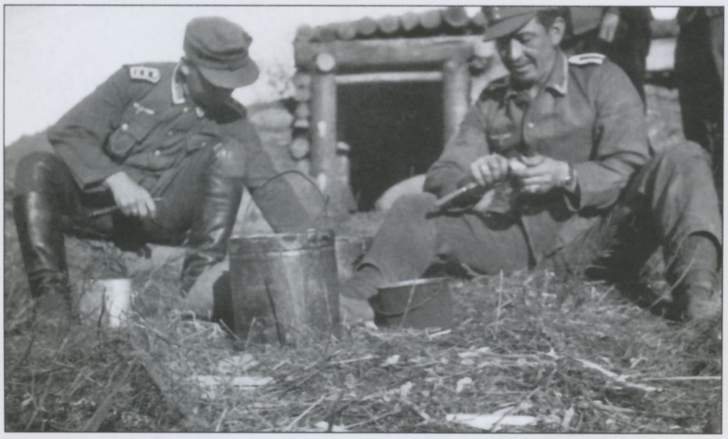
Camp life



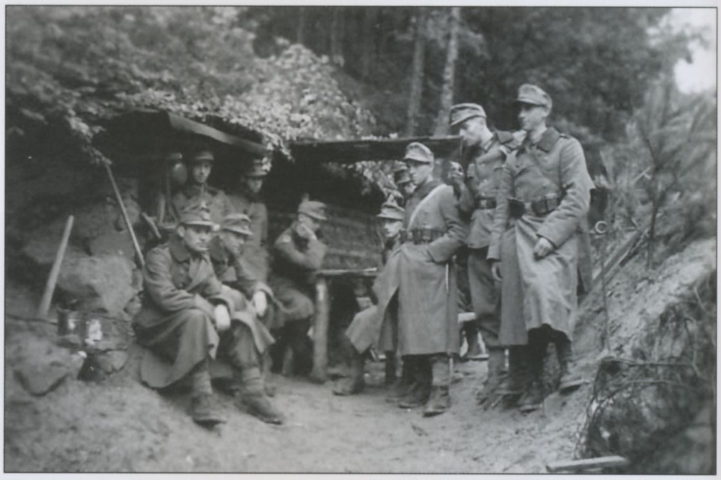
A grenadier (rifleman) cleans his Mauser 7.9mm Kar.98k carbine. He and three comrades (Kameraden) have constructed a tent by buttoning together their shelter-quarters (Zeltbahn 31). Shelter-quarters were printed with three-color camouflage pattern on both sides, one side in a darker shade and the other light. This example appears to have the light side out. Each man carried a tent equipment set (Zeltausrüstung) with four-section tent poles, a 2-meter rope, and two tent stakes. Note the field cap perched atop the tents apex to help keep out rain. Straw covered the floor for a degree of padding and insulation from the cold ground.



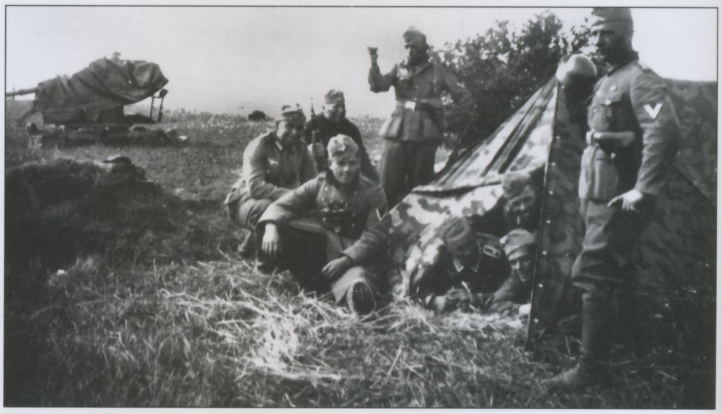
Panzer maintenance troops eat dinner in front of an eight-man Zeltbahn tent. They wear black field caps and black coveralls, which proved impractical being too conspicuous when they dismounted. This was replaced by a reed green two-piece outfit. Some wear the field gray (green) sweater indicating the weather is growing colder. In the background horizontal poles have been lashed to trees to hang drying clothes.



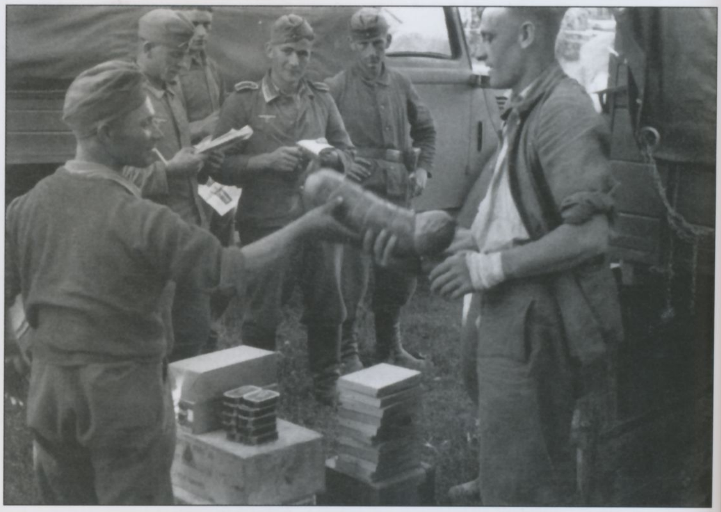
Soldiers became accustomed to cooking their own food. Here an Oberfeldwebel and an Unteroffizier of a Gebirgstruppen unit peel potatoes for their meal in front of the living bunker.



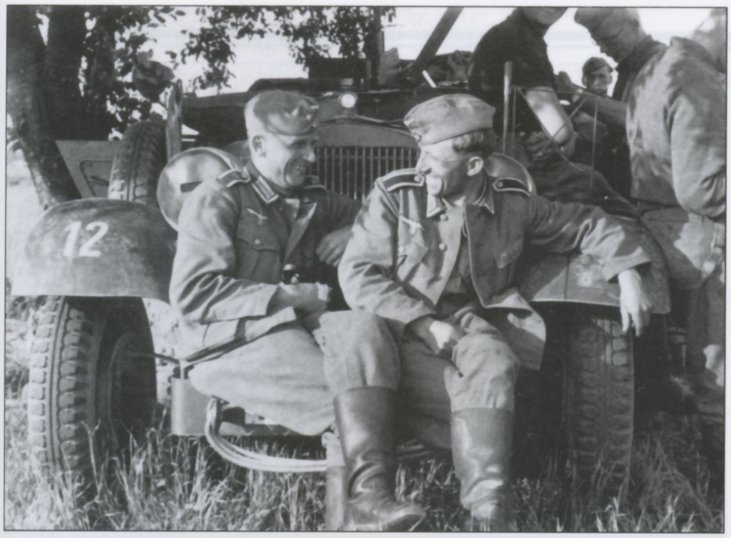
These troops appear to be well prepared for the coming winter having constructed a well accommodated dugout (Unterschlupfe) in the side of a ravine. The roof is waterproofed with tarpaper (felt) and even a front porch has been provided complete with a chessboard table.



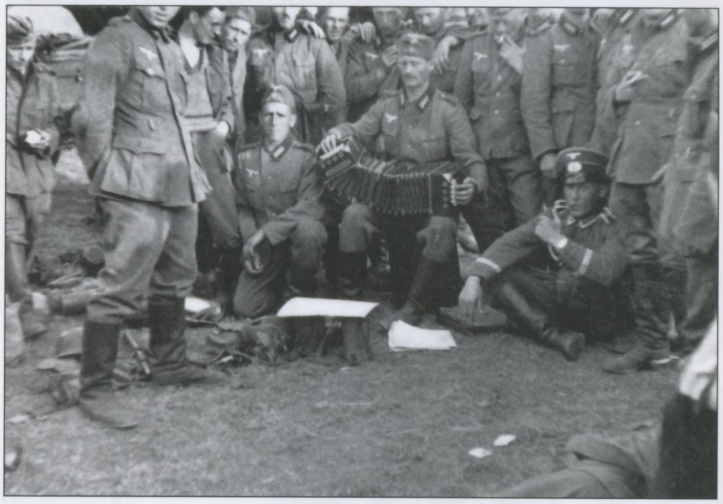
This 2cm Flak crew has erected an eight-man tent using a like number of Zeltbahnen. Light Flak guns had a six-man crew, but other battery personnel would share a tent with gun crews. Straw insulates the floor. Each man also had two or three wool blankets, one of which would be folded double as a ground cloth. Their greatcoats would provide additional warmth. The single chevron identifies a Gefreiter and two chevrons a Stabsgefreiter with less than six years service. These chevrons were displayed on the left sleeve. Gefreiter ranks equated to senior privates rather than corporals as sometimes assumed in the West.



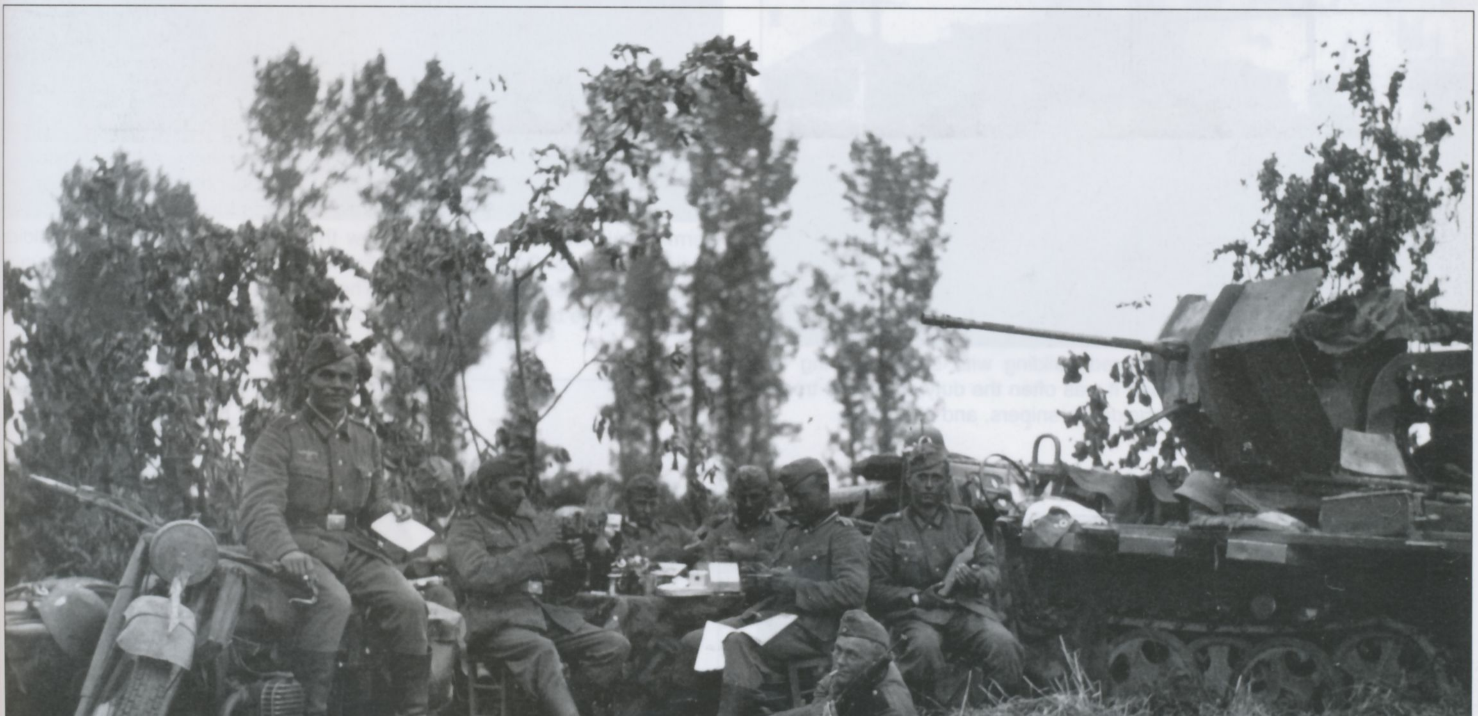
A company work detail picks up its daily rations, which are meticulously recorded in notebooks. The rations include a large sausage, cans of sardines, cartons of chocolate, and packaged dried bread, the latter known as Kommißbrot, trockenes Brot, or Dauerbrot.



Two Unteroffiziere joke while sitting on the bumper of a unit light truck. They wear the pointed-end shoulder straps authorized from 1936-38. Their continued wear was authorized until worn out and were frequently seen being worn early in the war. These straps lacked Waffenfarbe edge piping.

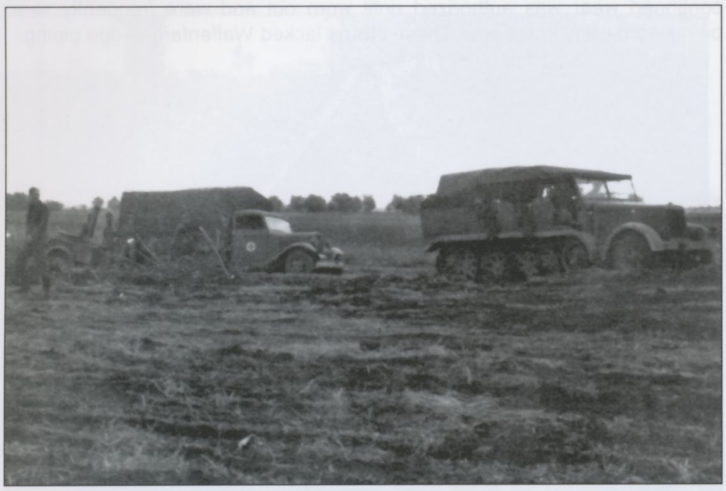


The unit reporting NCO (Hauptfeldwebel) seated to the right of the accordionist leads the men in a song during a rest period in the rear. A Hauptfeldwebel was often referred to as the Mutter ("Mother") of the company with the Vater ("Father") being the company/battery commander.

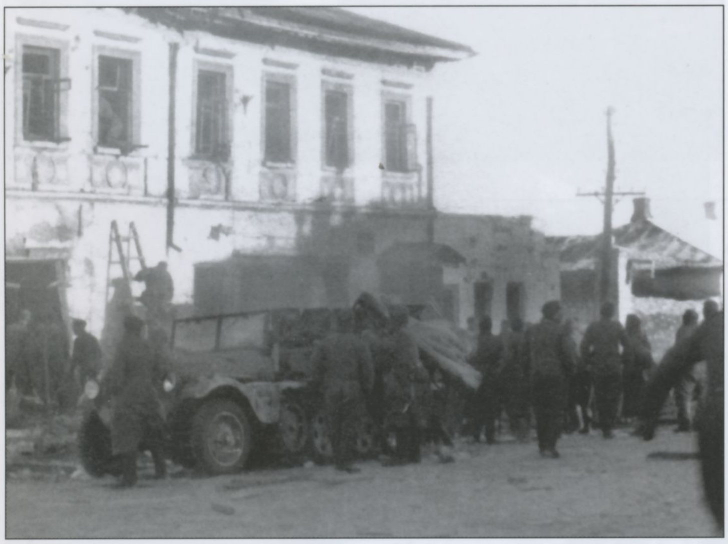


The crew of a 2cm Flak 30—mounted on an SdKfz 10/5 halftrack—read their mail during dinner. The German Army undertook a great deal of effort to ensure troops received mail and that their mail got home.

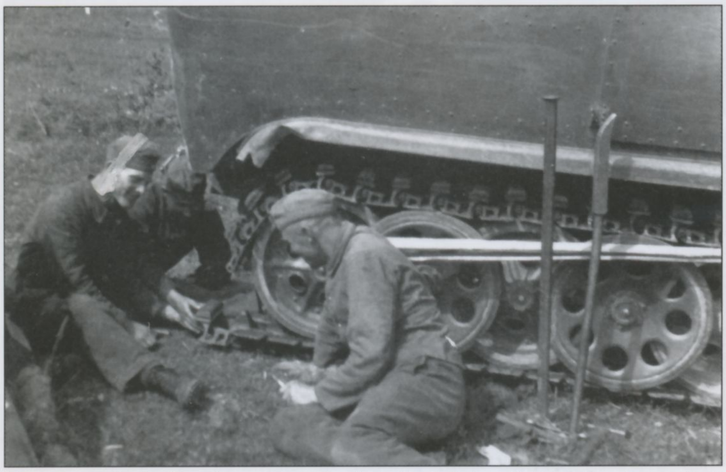
Services



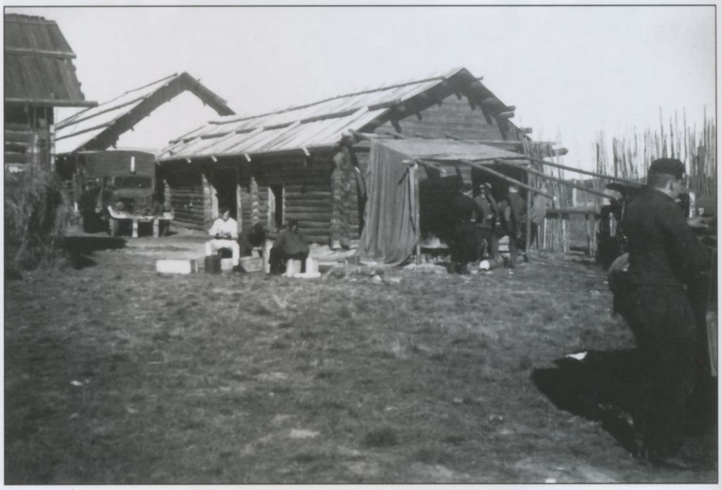
A 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack tows a cargo truck out of a mud-saturated stretch of road beside a plowed field. The truck bears a medical red cross on a white disc, but appears not to be an ambulance. It is probably a medical unit's supply truck, especially since it's towing an Sh Ah 401 filed kitchen, what the troops called a Gulaschkanone (goulash cannon) or Futterkanone (fodder cannon).



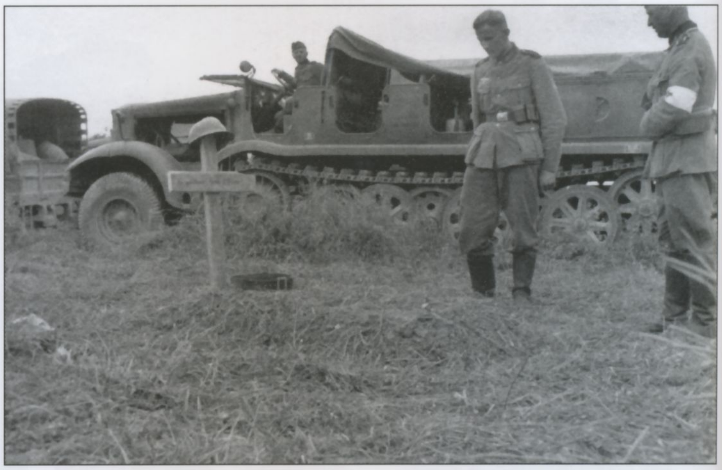
Rear service troops search a battered building with some entering the second floor with the aid of a ladder. It was often the duty of service troops to conduct mop-up of stay behind holdouts, snipers, and stragglers.



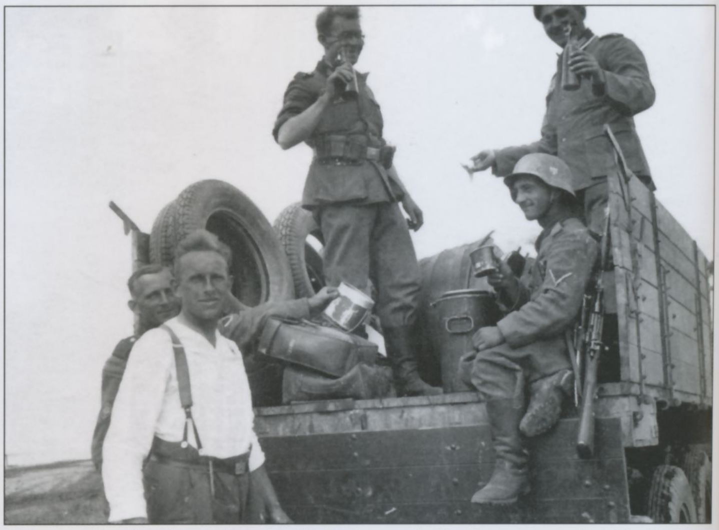
Crewmen of a halftrack replace a broken track link, a labor intensive task. A pry bar and adjusting tools are to their side.



A vehicle repair unit has set up shop on a Yugoslavian farm. Repair and maintenance units were fully motorized and capable of operating from special shop van trucks and tents in the field, but any available buildings would be commandeered and used. This saved time, provided more workspace, and offered better weather protection.



German soldiers take the time to view the grave of a Yugoslavian soldier outside of Zegreb. On the cross is a French-style helmet and on the grave is a leather belt, possibly an officer's. The NCO to the right wears a medical armband. In the background is a 12-ton SdKfz 8 heavy halftrack.



Troops enjoy bottles of beer with their meal. Meals were cooked in the rear and the food was carried to forward positions or to scattered elements in insulated food containers. The poor roads and hard use wore out vehicle tires at a fast rate and more than the usual single spare had to be carried. One can see that the truck's tires to the right are chewed up.

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